CBW

Number One
For PSV Professionals

COACH AND BUS WEEK 1 March 2006 **Issue 719** £2.50

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THIS WEEK

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Comeback
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The Buzzlines team tell *CBW* how they stay ahead of the game
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Sign of the times

Miles or kilometres? Is it worth the UK turning the next metric corner?

If I asked my daughter, she'd ask me what I mean by miles, just as she does when I mention ounces and pounds. The truth is, the next generation behind mine is already converted, to the extent that she can't tell me how tall she is in feet and inches.

I suppose that the eventual conversion into kilometres is as inevitable as the Euro - it's going to happen one day, but we'll hang back until the political landscape is right.

So we thought we'd do a little ring-round and ask what everyone else thinks. Operators now buy fuel in litres and have tachographs in kilometres, and we all have speedometers which have both. What's more, mileage abroad is all in kilometres, so I'd expect most operators not to care a great deal.

In fact, that's what most of them said. Neil Pegg at City Circle was typical and offered the opinion that, as it would be the first bit of legislation he's had that won't cost him anything, it would be a breath of fresh air!

Over in Ireland, the road signs were converted last summer, all within a few weeks. The Irish have always embraced both change and their role in Europe (together with any grants) with some enthusiasm, and earn top marks for accomplishment.

Ireland has also embraced the Euro, which at the time was accused of hiking prices by 10 per cent. I did wonder whether unscrupulous operators could attempt the same, and increase the distance on quotes by 10 per cent. And when asked, how would we term 'mileage' after metrication? Kilometreage?

I am slightly more concerned about the cost. According to the Government, the cost of peeling off all the mile stickers and sticking on kilometres is £700 million. For half a million signs. That's £1,400 a sign. Bargain.

Give the road industry a kilometre and they take a mile....

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
Editor

Coach and Bus Week is a supporter of the following organisations:

COACH TOURISM COUNCIL
Promoting Travel and Tourism by Coach

ABC

British Travel Trade Fair
1-2 March 2006
NEC, Birmingham

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Miles or kilometres? We don't care...

Operators aren't worried one way or another whether the Government goes ahead with its proposal to convert the road signage to kilometres.

A straw poll by *CBW* revealed mixed feelings about the proposed metrication of road distances, but most didn't mind one way or another, and there were an equal number of 'for' and 'against', it seems.

Last week it was announced that the Department for Transport had come up with a figure of between £560 million and £640 million to change the nation's signs, pointing out that some gantries over motorways with exit distances would have to be moved to keep the figure a whole number of kilometres, adding further to the cost. It admitted that the number of signs has increased dramatically in the last 10 years.

Some operators were up-beat about the idea: "It would be miles better," said Keith Payne, of Redwing in Brixton. "I see the logic. We all have tachometers in kilometres. My concern is that drivers won't know how fast they are going..."

Robert Pressley of Angela Coaches was less than enthusiastic about the plans: "I don't like the idea of making everything metric. I have to work with kilometres and litres but I always end up converting it back to miles and gallons because the metric figures don't really mean very much to me.

"I'd be very sorry to see our miles or miles per hour figures disappear from road signs. We are forced to comply with all sorts of things from Europe and this is just another step towards meeting their demands. I don't see why we should give them up - the speedo reads both ways after all. Those that want to relate to km/h can already do so."

Should we ditch miles in favour of kilometres?

Phil Goode of Goode's Coachways was equally sceptical: "I suppose it's almost inevitable we'll go down that route, but I don't like it any more than I like having to buy apples by the kilogram. In some ways it won't be of any major consequence because the dials are now all in kilometres and we buy our fuel in litres - however, I still have to do mental conversions to try and make sense of it. The whole thing is just another real pain in the arse, but I don't think we've any choice in the matter.

"As we do a lot of continental work we are quite used to working with metric figures. We'll just have to cope."

Neil Pegg at City Circle said he didn't have a view: "My first reaction is that at least this would be legislation that wouldn't cost us anything. If it didn't move any destinations closer to London, I can't see it would affect us at all. It might confuse customers, though..."

Nigel Skills at Skills of Nottingham would be right behind a change: "It's kilometres for me. And Euros. Once we make it all standard across Europe, life would get much easier. And I think with our children knowing nothing else, it's only a matter of time before it comes."

In Ireland, the road signs were converted last year. JJ Kavanagh of Urlingford said he didn't notice the difference: "The only thing I could see was signs on roads that didn't have any at all before.

"Our children wouldn't know what a pound weight is." *CBW* asked if he knew the average fuel consumption of his touring coaches... in kilometres per litre: "2.91," he said immediately.

■ What do you think? E-mail *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3.

Award for Cumbria's Eden

Eden District Council in Cumbria has won the CPT's 'Coach Friendly Local Authority' award. The award was presented at the BTTF on Wednesday (today) by Brigid Simmons, chair of the Tourism Alliance, the cross industry stakeholder group.

John Featherstone, chairman of the CPT's National Coach Parking Committee, said: "This award is about recognising the efforts local authorities are prepared to make to encourage coach tourism. This market is worth a total of £2bn per annum, and yet many destinations still see coach tourism as a second class product.

"CPT members were keen to ensure that those that made a significant contribution to the success of the product were suitably recognised."

The criteria include good facilities for coaches and passengers, clear and concise information for drivers and group organisers, and coach friendly parking and traffic management policies.

Nominations are made through the CPT's regional structure and then voted on by operators, drivers and customers. Eden encompasses the towns of Appleby, Kirkby Stephen and Penrith.

Previous winners of the award are Windsor, Salisbury, Southport, Scarborough and Rochester. The award is continuous unless the destination changes its policy on the handling of coach tourism.

Kirkby Stephen, in the garden of Eden

London wants more fuel-cell buses

London mayor Ken Livingstone is aiming to introduce 70 new hydrogen vehicles to London by 2010 and has called on the transport industry to prepare itself for delivery of the necessary vehicles and refueling technology.

Out of the 70 vehicles proposed for operation in London, 10 will be buses. Three fuel-cell buses currently operate in the city and their trial has been extended until the end of this year. Hydrogen provides an efficient and clean form of power generation with water vapour as the only exhaust emission. The hydrogen refueling station in Hornchurch will continue to provide storage facilities to support the low emission fleet following a successful bid to renew planning permission.

Transport for London has begun the procurement process for the 10 new hydrogen-fuelled buses. The Mayor is working with the Metropolitan Police Authority and London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, as well as Transport for London, to deliver and run the other 60 hydrogen vehicles.

Livingstone said: "Hydrogen fuel-cells could offer a real alternative to diesel in the future. The high cost of the vehicles is the major barrier at the moment but the greater the demand for vehicles, the more the costs will come down. I would call on the manufacturers to gear up for this change, as hydrogen vehicles are a real and viable option for London."

Chair of the London Hydrogen Partnership, deputy mayor Nicky Gavron, said: "This will move London to a position of leadership on this issue in Europe and around the world, and sends a strong signal to industry that London is the place to come to deliver hydrogen vehicles. The London Hydrogen Partnership is looking to join up with other cities to speed up development of this technology."

Ken Livingtone is keen on fuel-cell buses

Peoples Express bought by Go-Ahead

Go-Ahead has entered into an agreement to buy Probus Management - the 100-vehicle operator which trades as Peoples Express.

After due diligence, the company will be merged with newly-acquired Birmingham Coach Company, with a gradual change of livery to BCC's Diamond Bus branding and the eventual demise of the Peoples Express name.

Probus Management came into being in the late 1990s when current principals Kevin Jones and Jill Conners bought into the industry. It has developed a modern fleet with an age profile of under six years.

Among high-profile routes, it runs Coventry's Park and Ride and is involved with PTE Centro in a Quality Bus Partnership, the 404 West Bromwich-Walsall route.

Probus Management is based at leased premises at Hilltop, just two miles from BCC's purpose-built depot at Tividale. It also has a leased depot at Redditch.

In the deal, worth £2.4 million, Go-Ahead will take the 100-plus Probus vehicles and take on its 200-plus staff apart from the current management. Operations will continue from the existing premises, though Go-Ahead says that synergies may well lead to some 'rationalisation'.

Bus minister Buck resigns

After just 10 months in the job, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport Karen Buck MP is to resign her position.

Ms Buck, the MP for Regent's Park and Kensington North, informed the Secretary of State for Transport Alistair Darling last Friday. She will complete her remaining duties this week before leaving the government completely. She denied reports that she was disillusioned with the government itself or its transport policy.

She told the *Guardian*: "I have found after 10 months as a junior transport minister that it is not for me."

A spokesman for the CPT said: "We offer our good wishes to Karen Buck, and look forward to working with her successor."

The DfT confirmed that Ms Buck has resigned but had no further comment as *CBW* went to press.

Briefly

The Commercial Vehicles Division at Daimler Chrysler posted record results in 2005 with a 16 per cent increase to 824,900 trucks, vans and buses. Revenues rose by 17 per cent to €40.6 billion with operating profits up from €1.3 billion to €2.1 billion. Worldwide sales by the Buses business unit rose by 10 per cent to 36,200 buses, coaches and chassis. In Europe, the buses segment continued its product offensive where the range of products was expanded to include the new generation of Travego coaches, the new Citaro Low Entry urban and inter-urban bus and the new Setra MultiClass 400 inter-urban bus.

Western traffic commissioner Philip Brown is hosting a seminar and open day for PSV operators on March 20 and 21. Staged at The Crown Hotel in Blandford Forum, Dorset, the event will be a refresher on operators' duties and will be a useful introduction for new entrants to the industry. The event begins with an evening session starting at 1900hrs on March 20, followed by an operators open day – for both HGV and PSV – on March 21 starting at 1000hrs. For more information call 01792 454365, or email *lillian.carroll@vosa.gsi.gov.uk*

Dunn-Line has been awarded another National Express Service. It will operate service 767 from Nottingham to Stansted from Monday. The route will be serviced by four vehicles from the company's Nottingham depot and is expected to deliver turnover of around £1 million a year for a minimum of three years.

Following *CBW*'s transfer to new owners last year, former owners emap were forwarding e-mail. However, this service has now stopped, and we would like all readers and clients to check they have the correct details on databases. All of our contact details can be found on page 3 of this magazine, including mobile phone numbers.

FAIR TAX, NOT FUEL TAX CAMPAIGN

To: The Minister of Transport,
The Rt Hon Alistair Darling MP
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DR Fax: 020 7944 9643

Dear Minister,
I would like to draw your attention to the inequality of public transport fuel taxation as it relates to coach services in the UK.

At present, rebate of fuel taxation in road transport is available only to the stage carriage sector of the coach and bus industry, and only where route length does not exceed 50 kilometres. It is not available to the coach sector. I believe this is unfair, and is in contradiction of the stated objectives of the Government, and contrary to the original purpose of Fuel Duty Rebate, now renamed Bus Service Operators' Grant (BSOG).

The coach sector, whether taking children to school or transporting tourists, carrying groups of employees to conference, or football fans to matches, fulfils valuable roles in reducing congestion and achieving the Government's emissions targets... the precise functions envisaged for BSOG.

The growth and health of the coach sector is also prejudiced by fuel tax advantages offered to its competitors, rail and air travel. This is bad for the environment, bad for passengers, bad for congestion and is now damaging the ability of coach companies to compete.

The UK's coach operators, in the main, play a central and vital role in the community. Enabling people who do not own or drive a car or cannot travel unaided to work, to shop, or simply take a leisure break. Many have no option but coach travel.

A reduction in fuel taxation for ALL coach travel would, in a highly competitive business sector, enable coach operators to reduce prices to passengers. It would further encourage the public to use a means of transport which, against the car, reduces road space use by a factor of seven, and reduces emissions per passenger mile by a factor of 10. Furthermore, those passengers would be statistically six times less likely to lose their lives.

The value of the rebate could easily be recovered from fuel taxation for the private motorist, which despite the efforts of Government, is still seeing the proportional cost of motoring fall, with all the problems that continues to cause.

Yours sincerely,

Supported by **CBW** magazine

Fair tax, not fuel tax

'It's about time someone was fighting on our side' says one reader as we fight for a fair deal

CBW's readers have responded to the Fair Tax Not Fuel Tax campaign saying 'red diesel' or not, it's time to level the playing field.

Launched last week, the campaign is asking the Government to offer fuel duty rebate to ALL PSVs, regardless of the work they do: "The current rebate system is supposed to recognise the value the Government places on public transport and its passengers," said *CBW* editor Mark Williams.

"Ultimately, it's not coach operators who pay the fuel bill, but their customers. We can see no coherent reason why coach passengers shouldn't enjoy the same fuel discounts as bus passengers, not to mention air and rail passengers whose fares contain reduced fuel tax.

"In the past, ministers have obfuscated with silly statements about 'non-essential use'. Coach tourism's often elderly and disabled customers couldn't go on holiday at all without coaches. Other passengers can't afford peak rail travel and air fares. And regardless of who they are, all coach passengers are reducing congestion and lowering emissions by choosing the coach."

CBW has written to the Minister of Transport, asking for the issue of fuel tax rebate to be moved up the public transport agenda, and this week invites readers to add their voices to the many by simply signing the campaign letter opposite and sending or faxing it to the Secretary of State for Transport, Alistair Darling MP.

"I've lost count of the number of times we've heard Mr Darling say he's listening to the coach industry's concerns. Well, here's a chance for him to prove it by responding properly instead of offering the usual reaction, which is to brush it under the carpet and hope nobody notices," Williams added.

CBW wants the Government to level the playing field on fuel duty rebates

On the 'Inbox' letters page of this issue, Sue Reynolds of Reynolds Diplomat reacts to last week's suggestion by readers that the Government could cut administration all round by offering operators a 'red diesel' option, saying it wouldn't work for many areas of business.

"For coach operators who may have their own fuel tanks, vehicles on tour often have to refuel off site and would therefore similarly not have access to red diesel," says Mrs Reynolds. She adds: "Many small coach operators do not have their own fuel tanks and would therefore have to operate a separate system for obtaining any rebate."

Mrs Reynolds says that however time-consuming, the current BSOG system of reclaiming fuel tax related to mileage would still be cost-effective.

She added: "Keep up the battle, it is about time someone was fighting on our side."

Add your voice to our campaign by signing the letter (opposite) and sending or faxing it to the Secretary of State for Transport, Alistair Darling MP. Together, we can make a difference.

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Stagecoach expands use of biodiesel in UK

Stagecoach has seized the lead on environmentally friendly fuels by rolling out the use of bio-diesel to nearly 25 per cent of its UK fleet.

The company says it will expand the use of the fuel to the rest of its fleet as the product becomes more widely available.

The move follows a three-month pilot project at a number of Stagecoach bus depots in the north-east and north-west of England. The fuel is now used in 28 depots in the region and the whole of Scotland, covering around 1,800 vehicles.

Adrian Havlin, Stagecoach's group technical engineer, said: "This is another step in our ongoing efforts to reduce the environmental impact of our operations and make them more sustainable.

"Tests have shown that biodiesel can reduce emissions and improve fuel efficiency with no additional cost. We now hope to encourage the rest of our fuel suppliers to offer this type of product in the future to allow us to use biodiesel in as many of our UK bus operations as possible."

Stagecoach is sourcing its biodiesel through one of its current fuel suppliers, Teeside-based Petroplus, whose Bio-plus product meets EN590 and EN14214 Quality Assurance standards.

Craig Falconer, national contracts manager for Petroplus Refining Teesside Ltd, said: "Petroplus is pleased to be able to help Stagecoach reduce the impact of its operations on the environment by working closely with them to fuel their bus fleet in northern England and Scotland with Bio-plus.

"Bio-plus is an environmentally friendly fuel that allows for a cleaner, hotter burn in a vehicle's engine. This increased temperature reduces green house gas emissions by burning off more harmful elements prior to reaching the exhaust pipe. Bio-plus also has a natural lubricity that helps reduce wear and tear on fuel pumps."

Stagecoach already uses fuel additive Envirox in its entire UK fleet

Bio-diesel, whose use does not require any engine modifications, is more 'carbon-neutral'. The plants that produce the oils for use in bio-diesel absorb carbon dioxide as they grow. The fuel is a blend of 95 per cent diesel and five per cent bio-matter, which can be derived from the seeds of soy, palm, rape, jetropha and sunflower, and used cooking oil.

Stagecoach has already rolled out the use of the next-generation fuel additive Envirox across its entire UK bus fleet after the success of a 12-month commercial evaluation. Tests of the product delivered more than a five per cent cut in fuel consumption and an associated decrease in vehicle emissions.

More monster deckers for Ferris

Ferris Holidays has ordered four more of the impressive Berkhof Axial double-deckers for its Spanish holiday programme

Cardiff operator Ferris Holidays has ordered four more 13.75m Berkhof Axial deckers for use on its popular Spanish holiday programme.

Ferris will have a total of 12 deckers on its Cardiff-Costa Brava route when the new, digitach-equipped, vehicles enter service in March. The firm bought four 12m deckers in 2003 before maximum length regulations were extended. It bought two 13.75m deckers in 2004 and again in 2005.

A ski-box takes the total length to 14.75m but the company reports no problems in service, save the odd scrape, as the vehicles cover a regular route.

"We run a lot of Berkhof vehicles because they build them as we want them, although I always go out and see what is on the market before we place an order," says managing director Jason Ferris. "The deckers have proved that they can provide the capacity and economy we need. The new coaches will be even more luxurious. In fact, we're confident they will be the best looking, most comfortable coaches on the road. We're very proud of all our fleet but we see these as the elite as far as coach travel is concerned."

The vehicles cost £310,000 each, bumped up to £312,000 with the addition of sat nav and flat screens. The company has also specified full climate control, toilet and hot and cold drinks facilities.

The 70-seat vehicles include a ventilated smoking room at the rear of the top deck, constructed by two removable panels. Should anti-smoking laws be introduced within the next 18 months, the panels can be easily removed, creating space for an additional two seats.

The company has previously specified aircraft-style tables but found them not to be as durable as hoped in service. It has now opted for regular flat-folding tables. The vehicles also feature double bunks for drivers/hostesses.

The coaches are built on the Volvo B12B chassis with the 420bhp DH12D engine mated to the I-Shift gearbox.

Passenger bus journeys in Scotland are up for the sixth consecutive year

Scot's buses lead the way

Andrew Jarosz

Local bus services are used more in Scotland than in Great Britain as a whole, according to figures contained in Statistical Bulletin Bus and Coach Statistics 2004-05.

They show that, per head of population, Scots made 16 per cent more local bus journeys than the British average in 2004-05.

Other key findings show that there were 465 million passenger journeys (boardings) on local bus services in Scotland in 2004-05, two per cent more than in the previous year.

Seventy-two per cent of bus users agreed that the buses ran on time, 75 per cent agreed that they ran when they were needed, 75 per cent found them comfortable, 86 per cent felt safe and secure on the bus and 68 per cent felt that bus fares were good value.

Overall, 13 per cent of Scottish commuters travelled to work by bus, rising to 26 per cent for those living in Edinburgh, 21 per cent in Glasgow and 20 per cent in Dundee.

The Bulletin uses the results of the Department for Transport (DfT) survey of Public Service Vehicle operators to describe the trends in bus and coach services in Scotland, and to provide some comparable statistics for Great Britain.

It also provides some results from the Scottish Household Survey.

Key findings from the DfT survey show:

- The number of passenger journeys (boardings) on local bus services in Scotland was 465 million in 2004-05, two per cent more than in the previous year
- This was the eighth increase since the current records began in 1975, and the first time since then that there have been increases in six consecutive years. However, there were nine per cent fewer passengers in 2004-05 than ten years earlier
- The 2004-05 total represents 92 journeys per head of population, which is 16 per cent higher than the corresponding figure for Great Britain as a whole
- The total distance (in vehicle-kilometres) travelled by local bus services in Scotland was one per cent less than 10 years earlier
- In real terms, fares on local bus services in Scotland rose by 12 per cent between 1994-95 and 2004-05
- Passenger receipts from local bus services in Scotland totalled £381 million in 2004-05. In real terms, they were the same as 10 years earlier
- In Scotland, over the past 10 years, the number of single-decker buses and coaches has increased by 14 per cent, but the number of double-deckers has reduced by 30 per cent, and staff numbers were two per cent higher in 2004-05 than in 1994-95. The operating costs per vehicle-kilometre in 2004-05 were 16 per cent lower in real terms than 10 years earlier
- Since 1975 Scotland has seen a 48 per cent reduction in the number of local bus passenger journeys but an eight per cent increase in the distance (vehicle-kilometres) travelled by local bus services

Key statistics from the Scottish Household Survey, which relate to the calendar year 2004, include:

- 13 per cent of commuters said that they usually travelled to work by bus. This percentage is highest for those living in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee.
- About seven-eighths of households were within six minutes walk of a bus stop. However, about 26 per cent in "remote" rural areas, and about 13 per cent in "accessible" rural areas, had no bus service or were at least 14 minutes walk away from one
- About four-fifths of people aged 60 and over held a concessionary travel pass which allowed free travel on off-peak local bus services, and about 11 per cent of those aged 60+ had used such a pass the day prior to interview
- 43 per cent of car/van commuters said that they could use public transport to travel to work
- The main reasons given by car and van commuters who could use public transport to travel to work for not doing so included 'it takes too long', 'it's inconvenient', 'there's no direct route', 'I use my own car' and 'I need a car for/at work'.

IRELAND

Ireland launches crackdown on speeding coaches

A major crackdown on speeding coaches is set to be launched by the Irish Department of Transport following the publication of a report by the National Roads Authority that shows 100 per cent of PSVs breaking motorway speed limits.

This is combined with complaints by state operator Bus Eireann that independents are routinely breaking speed limits in order to undercut them on journey times.

The NRA report, published earlier this month, claims that 76 per cent of single-deck buses and coaches are breaking speed limits on two-lane national roads, while on motorways the figure is 100 per cent - but based on a sample size of only 23 vehicles. The survey is based on observing vehicles under "free speed" conditions - i.e. in conditions where maximum speed is not subject to constraints either by congestion or weather conditions.

Meanwhile DoT officials have been asked by Minister Martin Cullen to review the timetables of all registered bus and coach services, following allegations that operators are breaking speed limits in order to differentiate services by journey time in a market where fares have already fallen dramatically.

Bus Eireann has complained to the Department of Transport about what it claims are abuses of timetables by private competitors.

The 80km/h limit for PSVs is being routinely broken says the NRA

It bases this claim on internal dossiers that it has compiled after following other operators' coaches by car, and measuring maximum speeds. The company claims it has monitored competitors traveling at speeds of up to 106km/h on the Dublin-Cork road, and points to a licence granted to First-owned Aircoach which specifies a journey time from Dublin Airport to Belfast of just two hours, which BE say is impossible to achieve without speeding on some sections of the route.

Aircoach, who have since lengthened the running time by 25 minutes, say that they have no idea how the original timings were licenced, and point out that the licence was granted before the current First-Group management structure was put in place. Managing director Marc Reddy has pointed out that on some routes Bus Eireann timetables appear tighter than those of the private operators.

The Department of Transport has told *CBW* that all new licence applications are routinely scrutinized, and that a full review of timings on both Bus Eireann and independent operators routes is now underway.

The issue of bus and coach speed limits in Ireland is contentious - with operators claiming the 80 km/h limit is "unworkably low" and was introduced despite the recommendation of the Government's own advisors, who recommended an increase to 100 km/h for single-deck buses and coaches on roads where no lower overall limit applied, and an increase to 80 km/h for double-decker coaches.

A review of PSV speed limits was promised for 2005, and submissions from operators and industry groups are now under consideration by the minister.

Informal monitoring by *CBW* of a selection of randomly chosen PSV speeds on the M1 and M50 motorways close to Dublin has produced different results from the NRA survey - four out of eight PSVs tailed were found to be exceeding the 80km/h limit, including a private tour coach traveling at 95km/h, a service coach at 106km/h, an express coach at 102km/h, and a double-decker being towed at 98km/h.

More Setras for JJ Kavanagh

Leading Irish independent operator JJ Kavanagh has taken delivery of 10 top-of-the-range Setra 415HD coaches, to add to its all-Setra fleet on touring and inter-urban express work.

The order is split between 51 and 41 seaters. All feature full aircon, DVD entertainment system, fridge and Nimbus seats.

Company director Paul Kavanagh told *CBW*: "We're getting great feedback from the touring customers, and the passengers on our express network, they really appreciate the extra comfort the Setra can offer on a longer journey, and we've had quite a bit of business come our way for touring and hire work purely on the basis of the quality of vehicle we can offer.

Ten more added to Kavanagh's fleet

"We're using these new coaches on hire and touring work for ourselves and with Insight, as well as on our network of express routes around Ireland. We are committed to continuing to improve the quality of our offering on both our express and our urban services, and to this end we have also added a new 41-seat Mercedes Citaro to our city service fleet in Waterford, which has seen a new bus each year since 2003."

Kentstown crash case adjourned

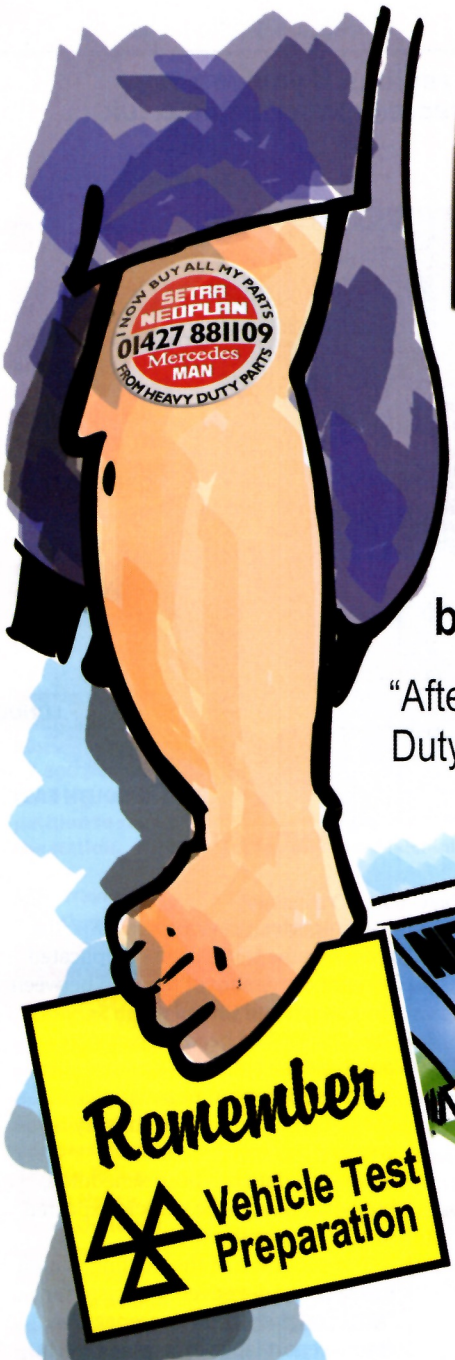
A court case arising from the accident last May in which five schoolgirls died has been adjourned, pending the consideration of further charges by the DPP.

The case, heard in Navan District Court on Thursday, February 23 saw Bus Eireann accused of owning a defective vehicle, and allowing it to be used in a public place on May 23, 2005. Similar charges against holding company CIE were struck out when Bus Eireann admitted ownership of the vehicle in question, a 12-year-old Vanhool coach.

The crash, the worst in Irish history, happened at Casey's Cross, Kentstown, outside Navan. Five girls, Lisa Callan (15), Sinead Ledwidge (15), Aimee McCabe (15), Clare McCluskey (18) and Deirdre Scanlon (17) died in the crash and 46 other children were injured. The driver of the coach has been cleared of any wrongdoing by the Garda investigation.

The judge ordered that the case be adjourned to May 3.

Kick the habit



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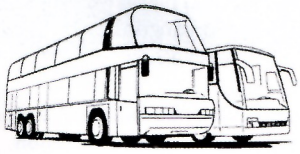

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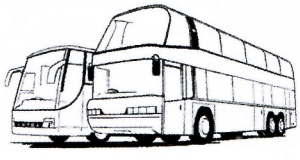


The Genuine Alternative

Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk*

SCOTLAND

Two top Scottish comedians will be entertaining **Citylink** commuters over the next two weeks to promote a comedy festival in Glasgow.

Raymond Mearns – 'a comedy masterclass' according to the *Edinburgh Evening News*, and Des McLean – 'the funniest and most original comedian I've seen in ages' says Peter Kay – will perform 20 minute routines on the 900 service between Glasgow and Ballieston. "The passengers can't get off," says Des, "It's a captive audience."

Nicola Campbell, marketing manager of Scottish Citylink said: "We think users will appreciate this unique opportunity to enjoy performances by two of Glasgow's top comedians. No matter what their destination, they will be driven to tears of laughter."

The stunt is in promotion of the Miller Glasgow International Comedy Festival which starts on March 9.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Translink temporarily suspended services to an area of Belfast and offered a £1,000 reward for information following an attack on one of its service buses last Tuesday.

The driver was treated for cuts and bruises after a brick was thrown through the windscreen. There were passengers on board at the time but no injuries were reported.

A Translink spokesperson explained: "Such anti-social behaviour is totally unacceptable. The safety implication of such a mindless act is enormous. The safety of our passengers and staff is paramount and to this end services were temporarily withdrawn from the area.

"We regularly highlight the dangers and consequences of such behaviour to young people through work in the local community and schools and appeal to parents and local community leaders to impress upon young people the dangers of this activity.

"Bus drivers provide a service to the whole community and these attacks are not just against the driver but also directly affect the whole community."

A similar incident occurred in Londonderry on the same day after a football match between Belfast and Linfield on the same day. Two **Ulsterbus** vehicles had windows smashed, and another two private buses were attacked, by stone-throwing fans. There were no injuries.

MIDLANDS

Expanding Birmingham operator **Zak's of Great Barr** has taken over the private hire and contract functions of **Chase Coaches**, Chasetown, Staffs, along with two Van Hool Alizee-bodied Volvo B10Ms.

Chase is intending to concentrate on local bus services, and their other business interests, which include storage facilities and property development. Owner Graham Dodd is intending to hand over the reins to his son, Andrew, during the next year, with the present management staying in place.

The move follows the acquisition of the coaching operations of the **Birmingham Coach Company** in October 2005, enabling Zak's to expand into the Black Country, which is now marketed as **Birmingham Coach Services**.

Zak's is one of the longest established independent bus and coach operators in the West Midlands and can trace its origins back to 1978. Based on a 3.5-acre site in Great Barr, northwest Birmingham, the business now incorporates special needs transport, private hire coaches, as well as both contract and commercial local bus services.

Support for a mother's campaign for extra safety features onboard school buses in **Leicester** is growing. Her plea has now been highlighted by the *Leicester Mercury* newspaper which carried a page-lead story with the headline 'Parents Need To Know Kids Are Safe On Buses'.

As previously reported in *CBW*, Sonia Ferguson is campaigning for a single-decker only policy, and for the council to fund escorts on school buses. Her son Rory was badly injured after falling through the top window of a decker following a scuffle.

Her call comes after 83 children had been banned from school buses in the county because of bad behaviour.

Leicestershire County Council provides daily school transport for 16,500 children. A council spokeswoman said: "With current funding levels it is not possible to replace double deckers with single – it would cost over £1m per year."

WALES

Swansea City Council has now gained planning permission for the redevelopment of its city centre Quadrant bus station.

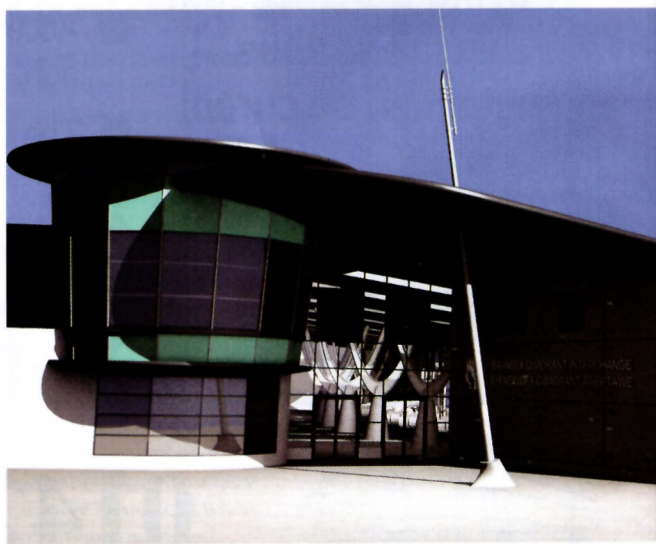
Briefly

A trial park and ride scheme in Wrexham was so successful over the Christmas period that the council has agreed to a second pilot study. The free trial over the three weekends before Christmas tempted 170 shoppers out of their cars at a cost of £1,000.

As reported previously in *CBW*, the redevelopment has been complicated by joint ownership of the land between the council and **United Welsh Services**. The council had been prepared to purchase the land with a compulsory purchase order but negotiations between the two were eventually successfully concluded.

No start date has been scheduled, but when it does the work is expected to take 15 months.

The condition of the existing station has come under severe criticism for "actively" putting off passengers. A recent report labelled it "particularly unsatisfactory at night". Before Christmas, the council ordered it to be power-hosed once a week.



An artist's impression of Swansea's new Quadrant bus station

Briefly

Campaigners battling to save Colchester's bus station say they will take the fight to the top if necessary. The borough council approved plans to replace the station with an art gallery called the Visual Arts Facility, but the decision needs to be ratified by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. More than 17,500 people have signed the petition to save the station.

Travel Dundee says incidents of broken windows reduced by 69 per cent, from 167 to 51, in 2005. It put the improvement down to its 'deter and detect' partnership with Tayside Police. Stuart Henry, Travel Dundee's corporate affairs manager says, "We take a huge amount of pride in the presentation of our bus fleet."

Energy minister Malcolm Wicks is backing hybrid buses

Swansea Council Leader, Chris Holley said: "The transformation of the bus station into a 21st century gateway to the city will be a key part of our city centre strategy. The Council is delighted to have reached the next phase in the redevelopment of the bus station. The development will be one of the most modern transport facilities in the UK. The Council is keen to ensure that public transport in Swansea is made as easy and convenient as possible."

LONDON

Energy minister Malcolm Wicks met passengers on one of **London Central's** new Wrightbus Electrocity hybrid buses last week.

He is leading the government's flagship 'Energy Review' public consultation, part of which is looking at the development of alternative road transport fuels.

Wicks said: "The new hybrid buses being trialled on the streets of our capital are a prime example of how new and increasingly commercial technologies are helping us meet the dual challenge of securing energy from diverse sources and reducing emissions of damaging greenhouse gases."

Mike Weston, operations director for London Buses said: "London Buses is committed to minimising our impact on the environment. Initial tests show these vehicles produce significantly fewer emissions than a standard bus.

"The bus network in London leads the way in the UK and beyond in innovation - this is another example of technology we hope might bring benefits to the urban environment in the near to medium-term future."

The DTi says the Energy Review has garnered more responses in one month than other major consultations have in three.

The new look for Southern Vectis

SOUTH EAST

Isle of Wight bus operator **Southern Vectis** has undergone a make over courtesy of Ray Stenning's 'Best Impressions' design agency.

The new two-tone green livery has been applied to the company's deckers using Southern Vectis' traditional brush method, for a high quality finish. The buses are being repainted at the rate of one per week.

At the same time the company is naming its buses after the Island's key coastal features. The bus 'Woody Bay', above, was officially named by Island Councillor George Brown and Alan White, Southern Vectis general manager.

Roadworks

M8 Renfrewshire
Until May 10: Delays expected and slip road onto motorway closed on M8 Westbound at J27 A741 (Arkleston)

M80 Falkirk
Until April 2: Speed restriction of 40 mph on M80 both ways between J5 M876 (Bankhead Roundabout) and M9 J9 / A91 / A872 (Pirnhall Roundabout)

M6 Cheshire
Between 2100 and 0500hrs until March 31: Entry slip road closed during the night on M6 Southbound at J21A M62 (Croft Interchange)

A40 Gloucestershire
Saturdays and Sundays until March 19: Road closed on A40 both ways between Huntley and Birdwood

M4 South Gloucestershire
Between 0530 and 2100hrs until April 27: Speed restriction and narrow lanes on M4 both ways at J20 M5 (Almondsbury Interchange/ M5)

M4 South Wales
Until April 13: Speed restriction of 50 mph due to roadworks on M4 Eastbound between J40 A4107 (Port Talbot) and J39 A48 (Margam On Slip)

M11 Cambridgeshire
Until May 6: Speed restriction of 40 mph on M11 both ways between J9 A11 (Newmarket Turnoff) and J8 A120 / A1250 / B1256 (Stansted Airport / Bishops Stortford)

A12 Essex
Between 2200 and 0500hrs until March 25: One lane closed during the night on A12 both ways at B1002 (Junction 13 Ingatestone / Trueloves Interchange)

A1(M) Hertfordshire
Between 2000 and 0600hrs until June 14: Two lanes closed and speed restriction of 50 mph both ways between J6 A1000 / B656 / (Welwyn / Welwyn Garden City) and J7 A602 (Stevenage)

In association with
trafficlink
www.trafficlink.co.uk

Making London a Low Emission Zone would cut down pollution from heavy goods vehicles, buses and coaches. How might this affect you? Visit **tfl.gov.uk/low-emission-zone** or call **08457 224 577** to get more information. Tell us what you think before the consultation ends on 24 April.

MAYOR OF LONDON

Transport for London

Alexander Dennis has announced orders for 197 new Enviro 400 deckers – within whispering distance of its first year 200 sales target. Metroline in London has already pressed the first of its 28 into service (see Deliveries *CBW* 715) and London General/ Central will take delivery of 15 out of a total 39 on order in May.

Streetcar given green light in York

First and council reach landmark agreement

Andrew Jarosz, northern correspondent

A partnership agreement paving the way for the introduction of ftr - Wrightbus's articulated 'Streetcar' bus - in York was completed between First and York City Council last week. The agreement confirms a range of traffic management measures, which will accommodate the articulated bus when it enters service on the only double deck route in York, on May 8.

A key element of the ftr package is BLISS (Bus Location Information Sub System). Each ftr vehicle is fitted with satellite tracking technology which is linked to a central computer, which can tell where the ftr should be, and will give traffic light priority to late-running vehicles. BLISS also gives an overview of where all the ftr vehicles are at any given time. It drives the new Real Time Passenger Information technology that will give updated information to passengers at stops along the route. They will also be able to use their mobile telephones to check when the next ftr is due at their stop.

Moir Lockhead, chief executive of FirstGroup plc, said that First was committed to providing high quality public transport networks. "The signing of this partnership agreement sets the seal on a project that I firmly believe will introduce a step change in the way that local transport authorities and operators deliver public travel. City of York Council has always demonstrated its commitment to innovation, and there is no better example of this than today's announcement of the infrastructure improvements that will play a vitally important role in the success of ftr in York."

Other improvements that are being made by the council in advance of the ftr scheme going live in May include raised kerbs, four ftr real time passenger information displays and a new 'Super Stop' outside York Railway Station. A second phase of improvement works, including raised kerbs, will continue through 2006/07.

World

A month ahead of the Commonwealth Games, the Australian state of Victoria has launched its National Intelligent Transport Systems Centre to enable close monitoring of public transport and other traffic during the event. The facility will also provide key data to ensure the Victorian government will continue to function during an emergency. The plan is to connect the technology with infrastructure in other states and territories via a massive internet connection that can stream 10,000 CCTV cameras from around the country at the one time. The Commonwealth Games start on March 15.

Ray Charles's tour bus has been donated to an American college he supported financially. Charles, who died in 2004, received an honorary doctorate from Atlanta's Morehouse college in 2001 after donating $1m for a performing arts centre. The 35 seat tri-axle luxury bus will be used for student trips.

Godfather actor Richard Bright was killed in New York last week after being hit by a bus while crossing the road. The 68 year-old was reportedly dragged by the buses' rear wheel from Manhattan to the Port Authority bus terminus as the driver had not realized he had hit anybody. Bright played bodyguard Al Neri in all three of Francis Ford Coppola's Godfather movies, plus had a further 80 TV and movie credits.

Singapore's first wheelchair friendly bus has taken to the streets, with wheelchair access ramps from Compak Ramps of Charlton, London. The firm says it just won its second order, bringing the total to 150. The Singaporean government plans to spend s$21m to make all public buses wheelchair accessible by 2023.

TOUR

Redwing leads drive at BTTF

Redwing Coaches, the leading London operator, is showcasing its new high-specification Mercedes-Benz Tourino midicoach on its stand at the British Travel Trade Fair 2006, which opened today (Wednesday) at the Birmingham NEC. The 10-metre Tourino has 32 seats and is a replacement for the MAN Berkhof coach that proved popular with clients.

Keith Payne, the company's sales and marketing manager said: "We are eager to show existing and potential clients that we can provide small groups with a coach which offers them the same amenities and the same standards of comfort as our full-size coaches.

"Where many of our competitors use lighter-weight vehicles for small groups, we provide a high-quality purpose-built touring coach which is in effect a scaled-down version of the 12-metre Touro."

Redwing is also adding a further 10 Mercedes-Benz Touros to its fleet this year. Payne added: "Regular investment in high-quality coaches is a key feature in Redwing's success and the Mercedes-Benz brand is synonymous with quality."

Regular visitors to this annual showcase of the domestic tourism industry will be in for a busy time, as there are more than 400 exhibitors and a comprehensive programme of seminars.

New exhibitors include the Eden Project, Roeville Computer Systems, Exmoor Tourist Associations, Liverpool Culture Company, Tailor Made Tours, Spinnaker Tower and the Dockyards, Mary Browne Associates and Aston Hotels.

■ Reports on BTTF 2006 will appear in next week's issue of *CBW* and in the March edition of *Out & About*

Holiday complaints on the increase

We all live in an increasingly litigious age and one offshoot of that has been the rise in complaints by disgruntled holidaymakers.

Tour and holiday companies - and coach operators - have to remain vigilant and make sure that what they are offering clients is what they get, particularly when it comes down to claims made in brochures. TV shows such as *Watchdog* have long found frustrated holidymakers a rich source of material, but now it seems holidaymakers are becoming even more dissatisfied.

The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) has reported that the number of complaints has gone up to 17,196 in 2005, compared to 14,600 in the previous year.

ABTA has blamed television programmes such as ITV's *Package Holiday Uncovered*, which often focuses on holidays that are not even packages.

As an example, the managing director of a large holiday firm was lying by the pool at a hotel owned by his company when one of the other guests came up to him with a clipboard. He was asked to sign a petition saying he was unhappy with the holiday.

When he asked what was wrong, the would-be complainant said that he had no complaints but he might get compensation if enough people signed.

Mid marvel: the Tourino is a comfort zone for small groups

Meal stops for groups suit to a tee

A new meal stop service for coach groups has been launched by Bridlington Links, a championship golf course that is just off the main road between Bridlington and Flamborough.

Bridlington Links has a bar, licensed restaurant and function suite and is adjacent to Sewerby Hall, a leading visitor attraction. The venue is able to accommodate two 50-seat coaches in back-to-back sittings, and welcomes bookings for breakfast, coffee, lunch, tea and dinner by prior appointment.

Menu options include haddock and chips, steak and ale pie, ham or ploughman's salad and roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Meals may also be cooked to meet a group's individual requirements.

Bridlington Links is open every day of the year and there is free coach parking a few yards from the building. Coach drivers qualify for a free meal and there is full access for the disabled. There is a lift to the first floor restaurant, bar and function suite. In the summer groups can sit on the exterior decked area overlooking the sea.

Visitors can work off the meal by spending an hour at Bridlington Links' undercover, floodlit driving range or hiring clubs and ball to play the nine-hole practice course. Parties of experienced golfers are welcome to play on the 18-hole course.

Alternatively, they can visit the local attractions, including the harbour in Bridlington, Sewerby Hall, Danes Dyke and the historic fishing village of Flamborough.

Coach operators are welcome to visit Bridlington Links prior to making a booking.

■ Contact Phil Hancock or Tony Siverston, Bridlington Links Ltd, Flamborough Road, Marton, Bridlington YO15 1DW. Call 01262 401584 or e-mail: *info@bridlington-links.co.uk*

Garden party: take a picnic and enjoy top musical acts in Kew Gardens

Kew music and firework spectacular

Add plenty of sparkle to a visit to London this summer by taking in a concert in Kew Gardens on a short break in the capital.

The Swing Festival is five nights of open-air music and fireworks concerts and kicks off on Tuesday, July 11 with Jools Holland and his Rhythm and Blues Orchestra. Guest vocalists include Ruby Turner and Sam Brown.

On Wednesday, July 12 Motown magic takes to the stage when members of the hit West End, show, Dancing in the Streets, perform classics by Smokey Robinson, The Temptations, Diana Ross and Stevie Wonder.

There is a change of mood the next night, Thursday, July13, when tribute bands, The Counterfeit Stones and Killer Queen, reprise the hits of the super groups, while the Friday night entertainment is headlined by Eliades Ochoa, the Cuban musician and one of the stars of the film, *Buena Vista Social Club.* The entertainment finishes on Saturday, July 15 with the return of Jools Holland.

As in previous years, there will be a Swing Village that will feature craft and gift boutiques.

Picnics may be pre-ordered and there will be discounted wine on sale courtesy of sponsor Kumala.

Tickets cost £28 per person and groups qualify for 10 per cent discount on tickets for the concerts on Wednesday and Thursday, July 12 and 13. Drivers may drop off and pick up at the Pavilion Gate.

■ Book via Ticketmaster on 0870 1600 539 or online at *www.ticketmaster.co.uk* or *www.kew.org/summerwing*

In Dickens' footsteps

Tourism officials in Rochester have come up with a novel way to learn about Charles Dickens, who had a long association with the Medway area.

Groups can sign up for Footsteps in Time and see the winding streets of the city as Dickens would have done. Costumed guides, who take on the personae of some of the characters from his books, lead the tours.

One of the guides is Sandi Digby, who plays the ill-fated Nancy from Oliver Twist. "It is great being able to give visitors a taste of the Rochester that Dickens knew and loved."

The guided walks cost £3 per person and last for about an hour. They are suitable for wheelchairs and must be pre-booked and paid for in advance.

■ For bookings and more details call 01634 880990 or email: *footsteps@mariner-house.co.uk*

There are two other Dickens initiatives in Rochester new for 2006. The Dickens Discover Rooms at the Guildhall Museum use tabloid newspaper techniques to explain the author's links with the area.

Complete the experience by seeing the six new interpretation panels that have been installed at the Six Poor Travellers' House in Rochester High Street. The 16th century building featured in *The Seven Poor Travellers*, a Dickens short story. Admission is free.

■ For more information about these and other attractions in the area, go to *www.medway.gov.uk/tourism*

Elena Roger will take the lead role in Evita

Package deals to see Evita

London specialist LHTS is offering overnight packages to two new musicals that are opening soon in the West End. First up is Movin' Out, which opens at the Apollo Victoria in April and runs until July 17.

It is based on the songs of Billy Joel, and James Fox, who won the 2004 Fame Academy, is to star as the Piano Man. Overnight packages start from £65 per person.

The summer sees the return of Evita, the Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber musical about Eva Peron. LHTS has overnight packages from £86 per person.

■ For more information, call LHTS on 020 7233 5322 or fax 020 7233 5250.

Family firm to rise from the ashes

Traffic commissioner considers company's comeback application after two-year absence

Andrew Jarosz, northern correspondent

Family firm Pilkington's of Accrington, is set to make a reappearance, nearly two years after having all its licences revoked, after an application for a new licence was treated with some sympathy at a North West public inquiry last week. The application has still to progress through several stages, although directions given by deputy traffic commissioner Mark Hinchliffe suggested that if the company made changes in its directors and adhered to a number of conditions and undertakings, it may stand a chance of gaining a licence when the adjourned inquiry resumes in four weeks.

The application for a new standard national operators licence by Pilkington's Accrington trading as King Travel of 135 Blackburn Road, faced a public inquiry at the Office of the Traffic Commissioner, Stone Cross Place, Golborne, Warrington. The directors of the new company were Leon Pilkington and Mary Pilkington, and the application was for an authorisation of five vehicles.

The history

During the proceedings Mr Hinchliffe referred to the company's past history, but details were only referred to in passing. He made it clear that the new application would not be dealt with in isolation from the past, and referred to earlier proceedings as being well documented, and in his bundle of papers.

Pilkington's, which has been in business since 1967, was called to its fourth public inquiry in June 2004. In 1998, the company was banned from operating two of its bus services, after the then traffic commissioner upheld complaints that it was interfering with other operator's services and failing to operate its own in line with registered particulars. In both 2000 and 2003, it was ordered to repay some fuel duty rebate, after complaints of late running and criticisms of poor maintenance were upheld.

In June 2004, the company appeared at Hyndburn Magistrates Court, before North West traffic commissioner Beverley Bell, who revoked all three licences pertaining to the company, from 23 July 2004, the end of the school year. The main licence was held by Raymond Pilkington, his wife Mary, and son John. Two separate licences held by Raymond's twin sons Alan and John, who were authorised to operate two vehicles each - were effectively merged for operational purposes with that held by their father and were also revoked.

During the hearing, Mrs Bell was told an investigation in October 2003, had found 15 out of 18 buses were served with prohibition notices. One bus had four of its 10 wheel nuts on one wheel coming loose, while another had a faulty door-operating warning system.

In concluding, Mrs Bell described the firm's maintenance records as "disgraceful" and said she did not trust the company with a licence: "The company has no idea of the requirements of operator licensing in the 21st century. This was not a temporary blip but evidence of a culture that is endemic within the company.

"I do not feel, from the evidence I have heard and the documents that have been produced, that I can trust you with a licence. It is better for the people of Accrington to have no bus service at all than to have buses which, as far as I can see, are not being adequately maintained and are jeopardising road safety."

The decision also took into account John and Alan Pilkington's failures to report their criminal convictions, both for assault, to the traffic commissioner - a condition of their originally being granted operators' licences. John told the hearing that he had been convicted for assaulting a female member of staff by pushing an ice cream into her nose. Mrs Bell suspended him from driving buses for 28 days because the conviction related to his job.

Alan said that he had not been able to report his conviction, for assaulting his ex-partner, within the 14-day time limit, because he had received a prison sentence, and he received a formal warning about his conduct from Mrs Bell.

> "This is not a puppet application from Raymond, Alan or John, who have been disqualified in the past"
> Michael Cunningham

The new application

Opening the new inquiry, the deputy traffic commissioner said that he had received financial information and was satisfied regarding financial arrangements. He asked why no accounts had been submitted, and remarked that because many members of the Pilkington family were present, why son Ian, with whom Mrs Bell had been moderately impressed at the previous public inquiry, was not present. He said that Mrs Bell had said that Ian appeared to have potential as a good transport manager.

Representing the family, Michael Cunningham said that no accounts had been presented because the newly formed company had not yet been trading.

He explained that the Pilkingtons operated two businesses in Accrington - one was a commercial garage, and the second was a light vehicle hire depot. Somebody had to remain at the base, in charge, and it had been Ian, who had nevertheless been named as company secretary of the new enterprise.

Mr Cunningham said that he had brought along brothers John and Alan, because they were suitably qualified as 'spanner men' having completed VOSA training courses, and

Key points

- Pilkington's, which has been in business since 1967, has already faced four public inquiries
- The wife and daughter of former licence holder Raymond Pilkington are the directors of the new company

Pilkington's buses were once a familar sight on the streets of Accrington

that they would be charged with day-to-day maintenance, but would take no part in running the company. He said that four-weekly checks would be done in-house and presented documents from KCL Truck and Trader confirming that they would do a three-monthly safety audit and also carry out rolling brake and multipoint tests.

Mr Hinchliffe replied that he might still want to see Ian, who might be better suited to being a director than his mother, especially as he had attended the inquiry before Mrs Bell. "I would not want Alan and John to have anything to do with the running of the company."

Mr Cunningham confirmed that this was a new limited company, a new entity with no management involvement from the two brothers and father Raymond. "This is not a puppet application from Raymond, Alan or John, who have been disqualified in the past," he said.

Mr Hinchliffe then turned to a matter of 'some delicacy'. He said he had correspondence from bus station inspectors on his file, but for one reason or another, the authors of the correspondence wanted their identities to remain confidential, and did not want to appear at the inquiry. "Their non-appearance renders their evidence flimsy, so I will ignore the contents of their letters and it will be put out of my mind. But, if failure to comply with the rules of bus stations appears to become an issue, then it would become a matter of repute," he said.

Giving evidence, Leon Pilkington, director and prospective transport manager said that she had obtained her CPC, and

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Deputy traffic comissioner Mark Hinchclife wants former boss Raymond Pilkington to have no involvement in the new company

was free to dedicate all her working time to the business, since the café she used to run had closed. She said she had put in some driving time and cleaning, but had not been a partner or director in the old business. She said she had not been put forward by either her father or brothers to run the new company on their behalf.

"John and Alan are very good mechanics, but if their work isn't up to my standards, they will have the option to leave or face disciplinary notices," she said.

"There is no control on my spending by my father or brothers. Drivers will be trained and maintenance is most important," she added.

Offices, garaging and maintenance would all be at the Argyle Street site, and the short term plans included applying for Lancashire County Council tenders, and registering bus services. For the future she said that if all went well she would apply for more licences and do more local service work.

Cross-examining, Mr Hinchliffe asked Ms Pilkington whether she planned to join a trade association. "If I wanted you to join the Freight Transport Association (FTA), wanted your brother

> "Your husband and John have lost their repute, they have been found wanting on maintenance, convictions, repute and financial standing – and mud sticks"
> Mark Hinchcliffe

Ian on the board, rather than your mother, wanted a promise that your father had no involvement, and wanted Alan and John to have no involvement in management, what would you do?" Ms Pilkington replied that she would be comfortable with these conditions.

Giving evidence, Mary Pilkington said the reason that she was a director of the new company, was that she had invested a substantial sum of her own money, and wanted to retain a supervisory role. "I want to make sure that the funds are not squandered," she said, "and keep an eye on things generally. I have all the experience from the past, and she's got to learn" she said.

Speaking to Mrs Pilkington, Mr Hinchliffe remarked that "notwithstanding the history and strength of local feeling against Pilkingtons," he was maintaining an open mind, but for balance wanted safeguards.

"Your husband and John have lost their repute, they have been found wanting on maintenance, convictions, repute and financial standing - and mud sticks.

"My concern is that you might be influenced by your husband, who has a bad reputation in this office, and I'm not happy to have you as a director, because I think there needs to be more than one of the younger generation on board," he said.

The decision

Summing up, the deputy traffic commissioner said that as a solicitor and a judge, he felt that the submitted application would struggle to succeed. He said he would be more sympathetic to Ian and Leon being directors of the new company. He said that if the new company were to change its directors, and Ian was prepared to come to the inquiry he would adjourn it for four weeks.

He also listed six critical conditions that he would be minded to attach to the application, and he asked the family to consider them during a short recess.

The conditions were that:

1. Safety inspections would be carried out at four-weekly intervals, and no vehicle would be used until it was repaired and signed off.
2. The nil defect daily driver system would be used with all drivers performing their daily walk round checks.
3. The company would join and maintain membership of the FTA, and that the FTA would make a full audit of the maintenance and systems. The first audit to be after six months of operation, and the second after a further six months, with the report file being sent to the commissioners and marked for his attention.
4. That Raymond Pilkington had no involvement with the company whatsoever.
5. That Alan and John Pilkington had no involvement other than on the maintenance side of the business.
6. That the company complied with all rules and regulations of bus stations, and that any breach would directly damage repute.

After a short recess, Mr Cunningham confirmed that Ian Pilkington had been called and was more than willing to become a board member instead of Mrs Pilkington.

Thus Mr Hinchliffe adjourned the inquiry for four weeks saying: "If the new board is satisfactory, then we could do business."

Key points

- Deputy traffic commissioner Mark Hinchcliffe listed six conditions to be attached to the application
- Ian Pilkington will be a board member in place of his mother, Mary
- The inquiry has been adjourned for four weeks

Operator allowed to keep school contracts

Inquiry hears of series of faults on minibus

The boss of the Highlands' largest taxi firm escaped losing school bus contracts after a series of faults were found on one of his vehicles.

Gavin Johnston, co-owner of Central Highland Taxis in Inverness and a director of a local vehicle testing business, last week faced a public inquiry over the safety of a minibus used on school runs.

He feared his Public Service Vehicle (PSV) Licence would be revoked by traffic commissioner Joan Aitken.

But she allowed him to keep his licence, subject to various conditions, after hearing evidence at the inquiry at Inverness Town House.

Joan Aitken

What the vehicle examiner said:

Allan Martin, VOSA examiner, said an inspection of Johnston's two 16-seater minibuses in February 2005 had exposed problems with seat belts, doors, emergency exits and the brake system.

There were also concerns with the vehicle components and lighting.

VOSA had expressed concern about Mr Johnston's method of checking that the vehicles were safe and this was supposed to be addressed. However, a further inspection held earlier this month revealed that the brake discs were cracking, and that there were faults with the alignment of lights and the exhaust clamp.

There were also loose seats on the vehicle and the fire extinguisher had not been secured.

What the operator said:

Mr Johnston explained that up until 2004 he had done checks on the maintenance of the vehicles and there had been no problems. However after that point he appointed an employee to carry out the checks because he was so busy. This employee, who has now left the company, failed to discover last year's faults so Mr Johnston subsequently appointed Stuart Anderson, an experienced mechanic, to do the checks.

However, on the day of the same vehicle's inspection by VOSA earlier this month Mr Anderson had been called away before the minibus was inspected so he had not had the opportunity to discover the faults.

Mr Johnston admitted that he had slipped up in twice failing to ensure the faulty vehicle was not checked but insisted it was the first time that he had been called in front of the traffic commissioner.

What the traffic commissioner said:

Miss Aitken said she was concerned that, given the importance of the VOSA inspection this year after what happened in 2005, Mr Johnston had not ensured the vehicle was first checked properly.

She imposed four conditions on Mr Johnston's PSV licence. These included that the vehicle with the faults be replaced with another vehicle and that Mr Anderson go on a course to learn more abut PSV maintenance.

Other conditions were that Mr Johnston purchases a PSV testers manual and a copy of a book about the categorisation of defects by VOSA and that he employs the Freight Transport Association to carry out inspections and audits of the PSV operation three times over the next year.

Miss Aitken said she hoped it would be a "temporary blip" for Mr Johnston and that he could put things right. Mr Johnston told the inquiry he was embarrassed to be before the commissioner and told her: "I won't be back."

Central Highland Taxis, which has been established for over 25 years, has over 100 drivers and 21 other employees. Mr Johnston runs the company, which provides 622,500 customer journeys a year and whose vehicles travelled about 2.5 million miles last year, with his wife Samantha.

Key points

- **A VOSA inspection revealed problems with seat belts, doors, emergency exits and brakes**
- **The employee who missed the faults has since left the company and been replaced by an experienced mechanic**
- **Operator Gavin Johnston promised traffic commissioner Joan Aitken: "I won't be back"**

Waste disposal regs aim to cut red tape

New proposals to slash red tape for waste oil and end-of-life vehicle disposal have been published by Defra and the Environment Agency.

Defra proposes to combine two major environmental systems - the Pollution Prevention and Control System and the Waste Management Licensing system.

Defra estimates that a single streamlined permitting system will yield administrative savings of approximately £70 million over 10 years for industry and regulators, with potential for additional economic benefits.

Environment Minister Elliot Morley stressed that the proposals were about simplifying the machinery of environmental permitting. He said: "Historically there has been a tendency for Defra's environmental permitting systems to be developed largely independently of each other.

"This has led to a regulatory system that is perceived as excessively complex and one that imposes unnecessary administrative burdens upon both industry and regulators."

The deadline for comments on the consultation is May 15.

■ For more information see *www.defra.gov.uk/environment/epp*

Events

MARCH

1-2: British Travel Trade Fair, NEC Birmingham. *www.britishtraveltradefair.com*

7: Delivering the 2012 Olympics conference, CBI Conference Centre, London. *www.rgu.ac.uk/abs/events*

8-9: Moving On Conference, Crown Plaza Hotel, Glasgow, *www.moving-on-conference.co.uk*, tel: 0191 241 4523

9: Transport and Economic Development in Wales, Marriott Hotel, Cardiff. 0207 787 1210, *www.thewaterfront.co.uk*

14-15: Smartcards and e-Government, London Marriott Hotel, Kensington. Transport policy seminar included. *www.symposium-events.co.uk*, 0207 403 3990

14-16: International Road Transport Union 30th World Congress, Dubai World Trade Centre. *www.iru.org*

15: CPT London and Home Counties Discussion Evening, Army and Navy Club, Pall Mall. Speakers include Phil White, CPT President/NEG. CPT members only. Ling Tang on 0207 240 3131

18: South West CPT Dinner Dance, Langstone Cliff Hotel, Dawlish Warren, Devon. CPT members only. 01364 661365

23: North West Bus Summit, The Centre, Birchwood Park, Warrington. *www.nwda.co.uk*, or call Nigel Featham, 01925 634296

APRIL

4: London Transport Awards Dinner, London Hilton. 01224 263134

5: Getting Active, Getting There – making the links between transport and health. Conference. Bull Hotel, Peterborough. *conferences@landor.co.uk*, 0845 270 7965

6-7: 30th UK Transport Conference and Exhibition: 'Wasted Miles, Wasted Money'. University of Nottingham. 01223 881622 or *annchapman@CICC-conferences.org.uk*

7-9: Coach Tourism Council/ Bonded Coach Holidays Conference 2006, Llandudno, North Wales. 0870 850 2839 or email *admin@coachtourismcouncil.co.uk*

22-23: UK Coach Rally, Brighton, 01753 631170

24-26: CPT Scotland Annual Conference, Gleneagles. Gail Hume 0131 272 2150, email: *gailhume@cpt-uk.freeserve.co.uk*

25/27: CV Show, NEC, Birmingham. *www.cvshow.com*

MAY

4: Employee Motivation and Incentives, conference, CBI Conference Centre, London. *www.symposium-events.co.uk*

8-10: ALBUM Conference, Cardiff. Karen Stafford-Smith 029 2078 7700.

9-13: Motortec automotive show, IFEMA, Madrid, Spain. *www.motorteconline.com*, +34 91 722 3000

11: The DDA 2005 and Public Transport: Myth and Reality, conference, Sadlers Wells, London. Speakers include Alan Scholes, WA-Shearings, Peter Hendy, TfL, Anne Frye OBE, Peter Huntington, GoSkills. *www.thewaterfront.co.uk*, for on-line booking.

17-18: Coach Tourism 2006, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire. *www.coachtourism.com*, 0870 3892903

21-28: CPT Study Tour 2006, Singapore/Kuala Lumpur. Details on 0207 240 3131 *communitytransport.com*, or call 0870 774 3586

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Why not extend BSOG to taxis?

Your correspondent Andrew Richmond of Epsom Coaches Group argues that coaches are the "only form of public transport" that pays car rates of fuel tax (*CBW* Inbox, February 22).

It is estimated that maybe 400,000 vehicles are operated in the UK as taxis and Private Hire Cars.

Statistically this is surely a far more significant section of the public transport system than the coach industry?

Should not BSOG apply to them?

Richard Matthews
MD, AirportcarZ, Stansted

Working together is the best way

Having read your editor's comment in *CBW*, January 26, about school transport, I support your views that the best people to train our drivers in crisis management on a school bus are the teachers.

I work for Stagecoach in East Kent as a schools liaison officer, and have done so for at least 20 years. I believe that we have a very unique relationship with the schools and the local authority, resulting in better standards on our buses. This has been brought about because we all work as a unit and within the guidelines of a code of conduct.

I visit schools to show safety videos and attend new parents evenings to help the children begin their adventure on school transport. All of these actions help us combat unacceptable behaviour. We also involve the youth crime reduction officer from the police and visit schools and homes of offenders together.

Recently a schools cluster group has offered assistance, and maybe some funding, towards school staff travelling on certain 'problem' buses and the possible training of our driving staff.

Although the school transport problem remains an ongoing concern for many of us, I thought your readers would be pleased to hear that much can be achieved if you can work in partnership with others.

Tim Pomfret
Schools liaison office, Stagecoach in East Kent

LETTER OF THE WEEK

A quick thought on red diesel (*CBW*, February 22), which in principle I entirely support. Many small coach operators do not have their own fuel tanks and would have to operate a separate system for obtaining any rebate. Living in a rural community I have noticed one fuel station that supplies red diesel. To restrict operators so they could only visit certain outlets could be an operational nightmare.

For coach operators who may have their own fuel tanks - vehicles on tour often have to refuel off site and would therefore not have access to red diesel.

It is very likely that a time-consuming form-filling system will be the only way forward. I will happily suffer any amount of form-filling to level the steep gradient on this playing field.

Keep up the battle, it is about time someone was fighting on our side.

Sue Reynolds
Reynolds Diplomat

How does the coach industry fight for fuel duty rebate? Let us know your thoughts by writing to the address above

CRBs should be more flexible

In this last week's Inbox (*CBW*, February 22) Ian Ashman states that problems have been caused with the refusal to accept portability of CRBs. This has been a problem wherever an employee changes employee/authority from the start.

As an example, teachers have to be subjected to a CRB check every time they go to a job with another authority.

Why is it not possible for CRBs to be transferred from one employer to another?

Stuart Turner
E-mail

Looking for an old forces friend

I write in the hope that you can help me find a very old friend called Pete Humber, who runs (or ran) a coach company in the Plymouth area.

Pete and myself served together in the RAF and later met up whilst I was writing for *Coachmart* magazine. I would like to get in touch as another ex-forces pal is trying to organise a reunion and naturally wants as many old mates there as possible.

I have tried in vain to contact Pete through other mediums, all to no avail. If anyone knows Pete, please e-mail *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk*

Ray Pearson
E-mail

A hidden gem in Somerset

I have relocated from Nottingham in my days of retirement to Porlock in Somerset and wanted to let your readers know that there are two parking spaces for coaches in the Doverhays Car Park in the village and no charge.

There are a nice variety of shops, restaurants and pubs and it may help an operator who has, say, three hours to spare, to call here and let his customers loose.

Bernard Jefford
E-mail

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1 March 2006

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Renault launches two-pronged assault
page 12

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Star Treka
UVG Modular's new Mercedes-based 24-seater ready to roll
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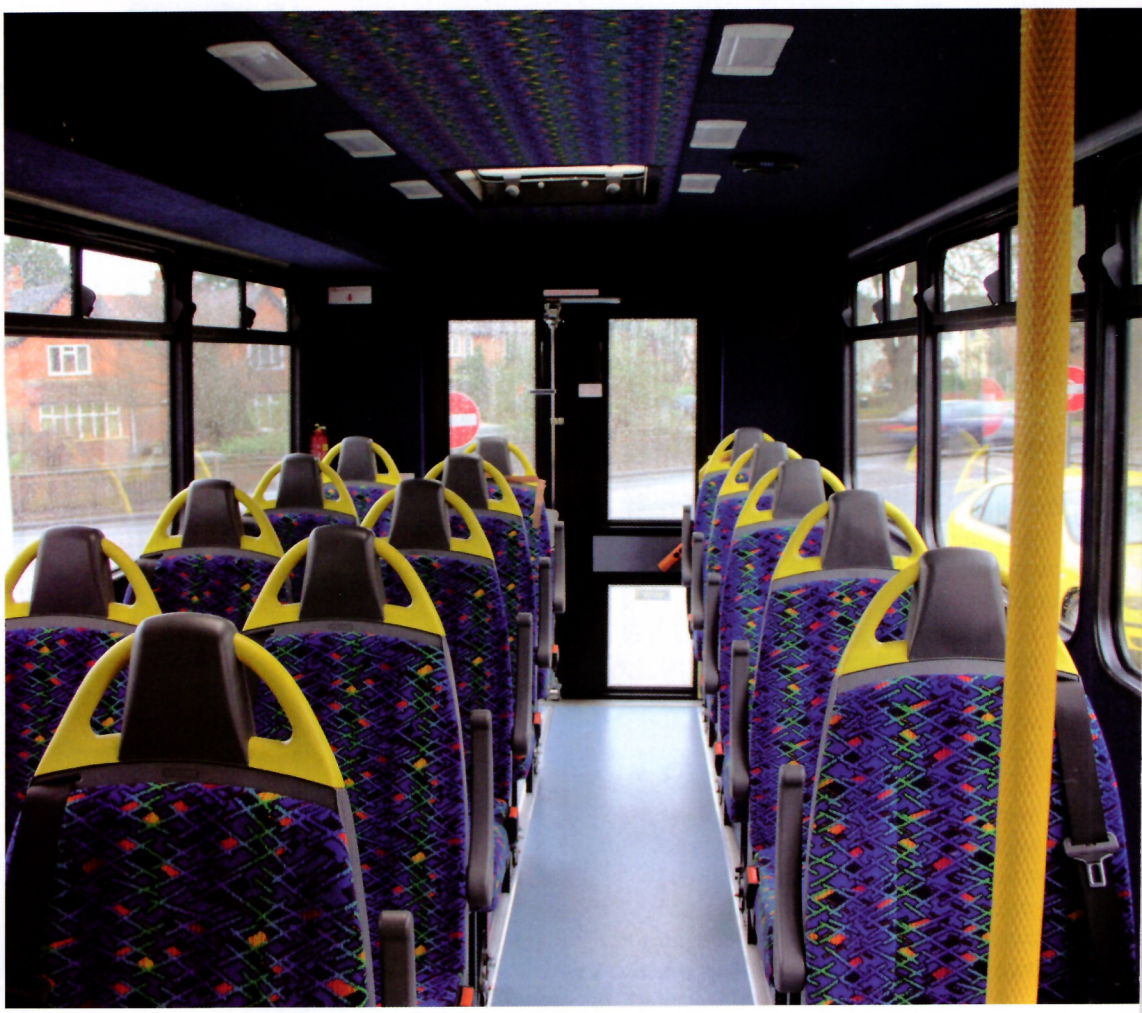
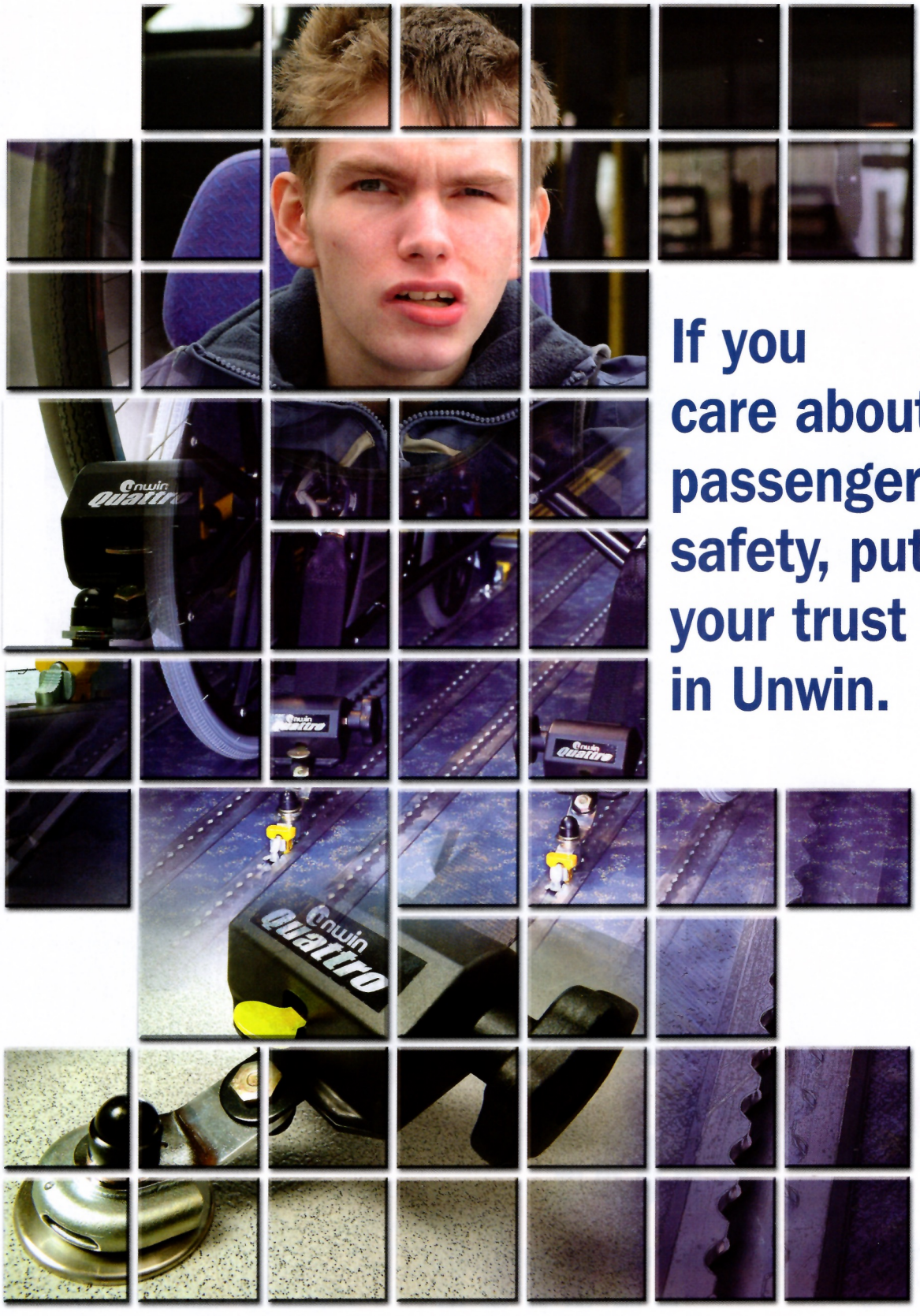


Hot stuff

Fire engine supremo John Dennis aims to conquer the minibus market with new Advantage page 6



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This week

Spoilt for choice

Judging by all the announcements of forthcoming new vehicles, operators look like they are going to be spoilt for choice. The timing of all these new launches, from Ford, Mercedes, Volkswagen and Renault coincide with the advent of Euro IV in October 2006 and it is an opportune moment for the larger manufacturers to update, upgrade or renew their products.

March sees the European launch of the new Sprinter in Vienna and we are planning to bring you the full story on the revised range as a result. Ford follow this with the new Transit making its debut appearance at the Commercial Vehicle Show at the end of April and the latest Renault Master and Trafic models are scheduled for launch in August. VW have not told us what they are planning and there has been no word from the Peugeot/Citroen/Fiat stable about any plans to revise their platforms at all. Iveco brought us the new Daily almost two years ago and apart from updated engines and minor specification changes we are not expecting much else.

Euro IV emissions legislation is going to get a very mixed reception when it comes into play. Undoubtedly it will benefit the environment as particulate and NOx output will be considerably reduced, and manufacturers have gone to great pains to inform us of the fuel efficiency improvements and longer drain periods we can expect by adopting the technology. However, they have been careful to avoid giving specific prices because all this benefit doesn't come without increased cost.

UVG's new Trekka 24 (see news, page 5) comes to the market this month with a base price circa £63,000. The company says it cannot offer prices based on Euro IV chassis because they can't get a price from the manufacturer. They believe a Vario 814 could cost as much as £5,000 more than its Euro III equivalent and such a step will have far reaching impact on sales and, consequently, hire prices to the general public. On the other hand, it does give buyers the chance to market the environmentally beneficial vehicle and, in theory, it should play a major part in tender submissions, particularly for local government departments or with corporate bodies.

On the subject of tenders, talking recently with a transport consultant revealed a cause for concern over the quality of submissions. The case in point had been for a substantial tender and from a large number of applicants, all but two were rejected - mainly on the grounds of just not being submitted properly. He claimed all factors asked for in modern tenders must be adequately satisfied and operators should not believe price alone can win a bid. The price quoted only scores a maximum 25 per cent of the criteria - so if you can satisfy all the remaining requirements adequately the final price is not necessarily the over-riding reason for winning or losing.

Martin Cole
Editor

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NEXT ISSUE MARCH 29

Charity contract for Stanford and LCB

Firms win Lords Taverners conversion contract

Stanford Coachworks and Leicester Carriage Builders have jointly been awarded the latest three-year contract to supply minibus conversions to the Lords Taverners charity organisation.

Effectively the contract remains in place as both companies have just reached the end of the previous agreement. All the vehicles involved will be Ford Transits supplied through Birchwood Ford of Eastbourne and the numbers involved usually fluctuate between 50 and 80 per year.

Last year Stanford Coachworks completed over 50 on behalf of the charity. This was the lion's share of the business for the year due to Leicester Carriage Builders having a shortage of build slots through other commitments.

The Transits supplied are all factory-produced 17-seat minibuses but each one requires further conversion work and 95 per cent are made accessible with the addition of a passenger lift. Ratcliff Palfinger has the contract to supply all the lifts.

Stanford Coachworks was recently granted Renault's approved converter status and will have it upgraded next year when the older Accord Technique accreditation is scrapped. Renault is to reduce the number of converters on its approved list substantially and the new scheme will be geared towards meeting European-type approval legislation.

A Master converted to a high specification by Stanford Coachworks will be shown on the Renault stand at the Commercial Vehicle Show at the NEC from April 25-27.

Beverley Jackson gains promotion

Beverley Jackson, well known and respected throughout the UK accessible vehicle industry, is taking up a new post with Ratcliff Palfinger.

Prior to joining Ratcliff Tail Lifts in October 1998, Beverley was employed by Courtside Conversions following the demise of Devon Conversions where she worked for 11 years.

At Ratcliff she was responsible for the sales of both passenger and commercial tail lifts in the South West of England and Southern Wales. She was promoted from area sales representative to business development manager 18 months ago. Beverley takes up her new responsibilities from today (March 1) and will be responsible for all passenger lift sales throughout the UK.

Beverley Jackson

"Beverley has worked extremely hard since she joined the company, gaining respect from all her customers." explains Eddie McIver, sales director.

"However, we have recently reviewed the structure of our sales team and, due to the ever-growing importance of the passenger lift market, felt the time was right to create a new position of UK passenger sales manager.

"Beverley is the ideal person to take over this demanding role and she is looking forward to returning exclusively to an area which she has always enjoyed."

Not happy with school transport for your kids? Then do it yourself...

Concerned Jersey resident and parent Anna Van Oort has established a minibus service for young school pupils in a bid to reduce school traffic and pollution on the island.

Mrs Van Oort's service is aimed at providing transport to a number of different schools between St Aubin and St Helier and is primarily for under 11s who are too young for the main school bus.

The service is also designed to cut costs for parents in addition to reducing the school run congestion at peak times. Parents will pay a weekly fee of £12.50.

Mrs van Oort also has aspirations for expanding her services by contracting to local businesses to cater for transport to work.

UVG Modular's new star Treka

UVG Modular is about to unveil its latest composite-bodied creation - a larger brother for the popular Treka.

Based on a Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D chassis with a 4,250mm wheelbase, Treka 24 features 24 seats or capacity for up to eight wheelchairs. The first model went through its tilt test last week and is now undergoing certification in preparation for launch on a busy demonstration schedule.

Specification on this model includes a full automatic gearbox and air suspension plus a climate control system but basic prices are expected to start in the region of £63,000 for Euro III versions. Prices for Euro IV chassis have still not been finalised but UVG believes they could add anything up to £5,000 to the cost of the chassis.

To date, Treka has been available on Mercedes-Benz Sprinter and Volkswagen LT platforms with options for Iveco and Ford added more recently. Treka 24 retains the modular composite body build technique and the stainless steel framing of its counterparts and offer a totally non-corrosive structure designed to give a long service life.

Correction

Last month's article on Mellor Coachcraft contained incorrect details about the areas covered by its sales team.

In order to avoid confusion, Mellor confirms that Bob Jones covers the south of England and Alison Prince covers the north of the country and Northern Ireland.

Bob can be contacted on 07767 221824 and Alison on 07860 586851.

Hot stuff

John Dennis Coachbuilders turns fire engine expertise to the minibus market

Martin Cole, Minibus editor

Fire engine supremo John Dennis has turned its attention to minibuses and the first result of this is the Advantage.

A surprise entry at the annual CTA Event and exhibition at G-Mex in November 2005, the John Dennis Coachbuilders' (JDC) vehicle bears all the hallmarks of its sturdy bigger brothers. JDC plans to implement a lot of the practical, rugged and durable technology it has developed in the fire engine world to its coachbuilt bus bodies.

Based in Guildford on the Slyfield Industrial Estate, JDC is just a stone's throw from the Alexander Dennis chassis production factory and although its fire engine chassis are produced there the company has no aspirations (yet) towards taking bus or coach chassis and will confine its activities largely to the accessible community transport and stage carriage minibus sector.

The Advantage is being marketed on an Iveco Daily 50C14 chassis with a 4.35m wheelbase and 136bhp engine with a six-speed manual gearbox, but JDC says there is no reason why it could not be mounted on a Mercedes chassis cowl - or any other suitable platform. It has an over-bodied appearance and a design that seems to be a bit dated by today's standards, but business development manager Eamonn Kilduff maintains it has been developed around what customers want in a practical operating package.

Newcomer to the coachbuilt sector – the JDC Advantage

The vehicle

Its key feature is the spacious saloon which, with two-plus-one seating arrangement, offers 16 seats, a wide gangway and a generous space between the outer seats and the sidewalls for additional passenger comfort.

The 7.6m body could accommodate many more seats, in theory. There is space for up to 22, although this would mean running into weight problems and the company is assured by most prospective buyers that they wouldn't be looking for more than 16 places in any event. This appears to be a growing trend with many of the local authority or CT operating fleets. They are looking for comfort in terms of spaciousness and, generally, where the passengers are more comfortable it is also easier for drivers and attendants when assisting passengers to or from their seats and when securing or releasing wheelchairs.

Gasket glazing also gives the Advantage a dated look but this has been included on the prototypes mainly to keep the cost down. Some customers prefer gasket glazing so it will suit their purposes admirably - for those keener on bonded windows they will be an option on production models.

It was clear from visitor reaction to the Advantage at G-Mex that it had caused a stir and was being well-received. There were a few things about the vehicle they were quick to point out that they didn't like, but Kilduff said this was good because it gave them a list of modifications to include which would then satisfy the majority of buyers.

The entrance steps have been modified and now lead to a flat gangway with no raised lip which would cause passengers to stumble. The door height has been raised as a consequence and this has had the effect of raising the bottom step to give a first step height of 320mm. This is more than JDC would like but it can be solved by fitting a slide-out step unit underneath.

The driver's vision has also been improved by making the windscreen line higher. It wasn't a problem for most people but taller drivers found they had to duck their heads slightly for an unimpeded view. There are also plans to modify the driver's window as the frame allowing the upper portion to slide open is awkwardly positioned and obscures the view in the offside mirror.

Sensible use is also made of areas where locker space can be provided for crew use. The compartment above the door is a useful size and the floor of the unit lifts out to reveal the door operating gear. A luggage pen is provided at the side of the driver - occupying the space normally taken up by a double van passenger seat. It is mounted on tracking and can quickly be removed from the vehicle or transferred into the saloon - space permitting, and secured on tracking there. Cant rail tracking is provided for additional security restraints for wheelchair passengers and there is sufficient space to include overhead luggage racks without impeding the cant rail track.

The company

Introducing buses to JDC has proved something of a novelty among the 110 skilled staff and there are a number who are keen to transfer on to the build programme when it swings into operation. Currently they build 120 fire engines a year and JDC wants to maintain this figure in addition to whatever it can achieve in the minibus market.

JDC also has plenty of experience when it comes to dealing with local authorities and sees the community transport minibuses as an extension to that process.

Well used to the vagaries of a bespoke market, JDC is quite happy about meeting customer requirements but has also

Flexible seating layout offers generous seat spacing. Below left: Richards & Shaw urban with 3-point seatbelt. Below right: Modified entrance steps lead to flat gangway

put a lot of thought into providing a comprehensive and well-equipped specification allowing the Advantage to function and perform an adequate job from day one of its instigation.

Kilduff said potential customers were already talking to them about building the Advantage on heavier chassis and he believed there were tremendous possibilities for a 7m long model, retaining the 2.4m width and 2.94m height, on a shorter chassis with only 3.75m wheelbase. This, he said, would be highly attractive to those operating in congested cities as it would provide generous body width combined with high manoeuvrability. New models from chassis suppliers also promised a range of transmission options and would, at last, allow customers to specify automatic gearboxes and avoid the problems they have suffered with short clutch life in such an environment.

The demonstration model was equipped with 15 Richards & Shaw 'Urban' seats - five rows of three in the main body of the saloon and a single unit in the rear neaside. All seats include three-point lap and diagonal seatbelts and are certified to M2 requirements. Between the rear of the last seat and the back wall was a PLS Doorsafe automatic arm designed to prevent a wheelchair and/or its attendant falling backwards out of the vehicle. A PLS Powermatic underfloor lift was also fitted.

Cassette-style rear doors open through 180° and are retained, flush with the rear bodywork, by magnetic catches. The front entrance door is an electric plug-type unit manufactured by Deans.

Construction

The JDC Advantage is built around a rigid aluminium structure which is fully welded for high strength and durability and good impact resistance. The framework incorporates a galvanised steel sub-frame. It utilises the same principles applied in building emergency vehicles which, by necessity, deliver absolute reliability. This also applies to the on-board electrical system which is multiplexed and means in the event of any fault occurring it can quickly be diagnosed, identified and rectified.

In-line with building such vehicles, the whole package is supported by an owner's manual and factory support via a helpline. Each vehicle's technical details and specification is recorded and field engineers can access the information via laptop computers - speeding up any repair operation.

GRP bodywork mouldings are employed at the front, roof and rear and the sides are clad in 2mm thick bonded aluminium panels. Trim is expertly applied and attractive, utilising grey and blue needlecord combined with a moquette centre stripe to compliment the seat covering.

JDC plans to set up a brand new production line for the Advantage within a 10,000 square feet facility adjacent to the main production area for fire engines. The remaining space will be allocated to building other specialist vehicles, mainly for the emergency services or government agencies.

The prototype models first seen at G-Mex, complete with the modifications suggested by prospective buyers, will now enter a busy programme of demonstrations and exhibitions throughout the UK. A major marketing effort is about to be instigated and JDC is confident it will pay dividends.

On the road

Good insulation is immediately evident when setting off in the Advantage. It is very quiet and it retains the warmth supplied by the Webasto saloon heater extremely well. Every seat position offers generous leg room and the seating is firm but very supportive and eminently suitable for longer

Cassette-style rear doors open through 180 degrees and are retained by magnetic catches. Left: Two extinguishers and a first aid kit are provided in line with requirements

journeys if required.

Road noise is fairly unobtrusive too and the only annoyance was wind whistling through the entrance door aperture - although this was attributed to a need for getting the fine adjustment on the actuating mechanism done correctly - and still awaiting a call from the Deans engineer.

With 136bhp on tap and a six-speed gearbox, the Daily copes well with the large body. The gear changes are almost effortless and the motor has plenty of torque. It had just been fitted with a speed limiter, set to 100kph, but around Guildford's urban roads it wasn't even called on.

A reversing camera (optional) helps when backing the vehicle in restricted places and the system is supported by a sonic device which gives an audible warning of any obstruction.

Steering is light and positive and the brakes very smooth and progressive - making it a very pleasant vehicle to drive. The only real concerns for the driver are the impeded view of the offside mirror and that the mirrors themselves are not easily set in an ideal position. The units don't have infinite adjustment and only locate into registered positions. This is a problem being addressed by Iveco and new mirrors are being introduced on Daily models later this year.

Diabolical weather with cold, rain, sleet and a stiff wind curtailed the test drive somewhat in a bid to take advantage of any lull to get some photographs, but the overall impression is one of a very rugged and well crafted vehicle with much in its favour and very little to criticise.

It turned a lot of heads at G-Mex and despite a rather dated appearance it is very close to ideal specification. Customers are increasingly turning to coachbuilt bodies for their additional space and flexibility of operation and the Advantage goes a long way towards meeting all the requirements.

It can also be produced with a coach-style interior for those seeking accessibility with a more luxurious saloon for tours or holidays. JDC can also build-in underfloor lockers to provide additional luggage space on these models.

All JDC parts and fittings are covered by a three-year warranty and the mechanical and driveline components are catered for under the chassis manufacturer's warranty.

The list of options is almost endless from chassis variations and specification, transmissions, air suspension, Telma retarder and other safety equipment to destination equipment, bus stopping signs, bell pushes and more exotic fittings like GPS satellite navigation systems, audio equipment and ticket machines.

FACT FILE

Chassis: Iveco Daily 50C14
Driveline: 3.0 litre HPi engine with six-speed manual gearbox
Seats: Richards & Shaw Urban M2 – up to 22 or up to five wheelchairs
Length: 7.6m
Width: 2.3m
Height: 2.94m
Headroom: 1.98m
GVW: 5,400kg
Lift: PLS Powermatic
Heating: Webasto Airtop 5000
Contact: 01483 501457

Sprinter schoolbus majors on safety

Austrians demonstrate ultimate vehicle – including a 'black box' crash recorder

When it comes to safety on school buses, the Austrians don't cut any corners. Passenger safety was the core element of the new Mercedes-Benz Sprinter developed specifically for school transport operations in Austria.

The manufacturer has been engaged as an exclusive partner in the 'New Generation School Bus' concept – a pilot project organised by the Upper Austria State Government, which was first unveiled to the public in Linz, Austria on January 31, 2006.

The new minibus was conceived by Mercedes-Benz Minibus GmbH in Dortmund, authorised importer Mercedes-Benz Austria and local dealer Pappas Linz. The project is scheduled to run for 11 months.

In addition to an extensive safety package specified as standard for Sprinter minibuses, this vehicle features a raft of additional safety measures, some of which have been implemented for the very first time – theoretically making it the safest school minibus currently on the road in Austria.

The Austrian Sprinter Schoolbus is a hit with kids

Safety equipment

The vehicle is based on a standard Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 313 CDI minibus with a 3,550mm wheelbase and a raised roof. Its main attributes are its compact 5,640mm overall length and a high degree of manoeuvrability-including a small turning circle.

Stock Sprinters already feature anti-lock braking system (ABS), acceleration skid control (ASR), Brake Assist (BAS), electronic brake force distribution (EBV) and the Electronic Stability Program.

Fluorescent yellow paintwork was added to make the vehicle stand out and increase other road users' awareness.

Another feature is a fold-out stop sign with two integrated flashing lights on the left (offside) at the rear of the sidewall, which the driver operates simply by pressing a button after stopping the bus. The stop sign and the flashing lights serve as an unequivocal reminder for other road users, indicating that it is forbidden to overtake a stopping school bus – a law often unheeded in Austria.

Accessibility

Access to the passenger saloon is provided by a sliding door on the right-hand side of the vehicle. The door is electrically operated by the driver and comes fitted with an obstruction sensor as well as a door-reversing device.

An automatic step – controlled by a door contact switch which extends or retracts the step when the sliding door is operated – enhances both safety and convenience. It also lowers the entrance height by approximately 100mm to 230mm. This is said to benefit younger passengers and, obviously, those with restricted mobility.

The driver can monitor passengers boarding the bus at all times via a CCTV system with a camera positioned above the entrance door. A flat-screen monitor is mounted on the dashboard for convenience.

There is also an exterior loudspeaker, near the sliding door, allowing the driver to address the waiting passengers. Interior lighting includes additional night-lighting which aids orientation in the passenger compartment when it is dark outside.

Capacity in the Sprinter Schoolbus is limited to just seven children. The saloon area contains either five single seats and two folding seats or five seats for schoolchildren plus two wheelchair spaces, with a driver's and co-driver's seat at the front. The rear seats are attached to a floor-tracking rail system, while the restraint systems take account of both age and weight. All the seats have three-point seat belts.

The two single seats at the rear can be folded together and swivelled to the side, creating space for wheelchairs. They are assisted on board by an electro-hydraulic lift at the rear. Once aboard they can be fastened to the floor rails using a system of special belts.

In the event of an accident, a black box-style crash recorder enables rapid analysis of the accident. Automatically recorded data includes the main handling-dynamics in the final seconds leading up to an accident. The analysis looks at stored, extremely precise data and can determine details of whether the horn or indicators were being operated at critical times, for example.

Artistic licence...

A Swindon operator says all licencing isn't the same as he battles against a growing number of section 19 permits

Jeff McGarry

Andrew Peace, CBW news editor

G-Line Mini Coaches of Swindon has faced some stark choices over the last few years.

Since Swindon Borough Council (SBC) started to allow Section 19 licence holders to bid for social work and special needs contracts, O-licence-holding G-Line has seen its traditional sources of work start to dry up. Because of higher overheads of 'commercial' O-licensing, beating the competition is impossible, and joining them was never an option for the family-run firm. Instead owner Jeff McGarry decided to tough it out, and is waging a campaign to get the council to change its policy.

He may be down but he is not out - McGarry greets *CBW* with a wry smile at his premises in central Swindon. Outside are some of his vehicles, tidy and well-kept Mercedes-Benz Varios, all maintained in his on-site workshop.

Upstairs in his office he comes straight to the point of our meeting. "I'm being rapidly pushed out of this business because of the proliferation of Section 19 operators. They don't have the legal requirements of PSV licence holders in terms of vehicle servicing and inspections, therefore their overheads are much lower and competing with them is very difficult.

"But my main bugbear with section 19 licences is that I am supposed to be a businessman," he says. "And therein lies the struggle I've had. I should have closed this business and gone and found another business to run. But this has been a family-run business for the last 25 years and I have an emotional attachment."

Special care from the start

G-Line was started 25 years ago by McGarry's father, although it has targeted special needs transport for the last 20 years. One family member was confined to a wheelchair, which partly explains his uncompromising attitude to care of the vulnerable.

"The outcome has been that if somebody in your care is awarded a place at a care centre due to ill health, when the bus picks them up it meets all the requirements to carry them but doesn't meet the requirements to carry you as a normal member of the public.

"These people are the most vulnerable, so they need higher standards of care, not lower. It is not OK to say, 'Because these are special needs then it is OK'. I think that is wrong."

> I'm being rapidly pushed out of this business because of the proliferation of section 19 operators

Swindon Borough Council started allowing section 19 operators to start bidding for commercial contracts as a way of allowing the council-funded Dial-A-Ride service to bid for commercial services and reduce its £300,000 a year grant.

The cash-strapped council has done very well financially by allowing Section 19 operators in, reportedly saving between 10-15 per cent on the costs of O-licenced operators. But that need not mean lower standards, says SBC.

A spokesman told *CBW*: "Since 1997 we have used some companies operating on section 19 community licences for special needs and social services work, and for those purposes only.

"We do insist on extra criteria being satisfied, like MIDAS training for drivers, and that annual independent vehicle checks are carried out. We have a duty to find the best price. We are perfectly at liberty to procure services in this way, and we are by no means unique."

But some Section 19 operators do not offer the same standard, McGarry insists. G-Line has been dealing with the side-effects of this decision only since 2002, when the penny dropped and other operators started to tender for, and won, work from the council.

The council's attitude to lowest-cost tenders throws up, as ever, some

What is section 19?

Section 19 'permits' are an alternative to an O-licence, which are issued conditional on the operator making no profit, and not carrying 'the public at large'.

There are no qualifications for the applicant (such as CPC) and drivers are exempt from PCV category D driver licencing. Vehicles below 17 seats do not require a Certificate of Initial Fitness, and there is no requirement for the operator to have specific maintenance or inspection facilities.

strange anomalies. McGarry says the competitive situation in Swindon got to the point that his company found itself operating an uneconomic, six-vehicle contract. The council would not allow a simple price increase, forcing the company to give the contract up and re-tender for it. G-Line was undercut and lost the contract.

Soon after the new contract was started it became obvious that the new specification was inadequate. The six vehicles supplied by a section 19 operator were found to be too small, so the tender was re-issued, this time for an extra vehicle of the same size.

G-Line's six vehicles would have been sufficient to cover the original tender, says Jeff, and its proposed price would have undercut the eventual contract by several thousands of pounds.

A question of commitment

"All these years I've been expecting my staff to do their jobs properly and now they are expecting me to do my job properly - to go out and find them work," says McGarry.

"I do not believe clients and carers were consulted properly on what they thought about these changes."

McGarry has diversified into corporate work and by expanding the services of his on-site workshop. But the changes have been too much for some.

"We've been struggling for the past three years and I've seen all the members of my family have to leave. It's just me left."

He stays because he still believes special needs is a good business: "We were very proud to be able to offer that professional service. The other businesses don't give me the same pride. I like to have that pride and satisfaction, and the appreciation you get back from the clients.

"I might have it all wrong, but it's impossible to walk away without thinking I've tried my hardest. Some things don't work, but we have a lot of experience here and I think we are right. I don't think what is happening here should be allowed to happen. All it takes is for somebody to challenge these things. I don't want to be another whinger."

He says he has received some support from Swindon councillors, but that it takes longer for them to change policy. If they do, they'll have support from the real customers - the travelling public: "We are still in regular contact with one of our old day centres, and they want us back.

"I'm lucky in that my personal circumstances allow me to take on this fight and try and get things changed. I'm not prepared to be quiet about this. It is a decision made by the misguided few, perhaps with the best intentions.

"Sometimes these things evolve into something that was not foreseen. I cannot believe people would want lower standards," he says.

> I might have it all wrong, but it's impossible to walk away without thinking I've tried my hardest

G-Line's vehicles are well looked after in its own workshop

G-Line's 25 years in operation

G-Line Minicoaches was founded 25 years ago by Jeff's father. He was made redundant from what is now the BMW factory in Swindon and invested the money in a 12-seater Ford Transit minibus. He started initially with private hire work but within two years another local operator went under and he inherited five school contracts, thus starting the relationship with Swindon Borough Council.

The firm gravitated towards special needs because of the security initially – the council has a duty of care to provide special needs clients transport to day centres. But the firm quickly realised it also had an affinity with the work. Jeff says: "You get a much better class of customer, there is much less stress, and less damage to the vehicles."

Around 10 years ago, Jeff's brother Neville joined the business and spotted an invitation to tender for a large special needs contract moving around 100 people a day. He put together a hypothetical tender and, to his surprise, won the contract. This took the firm to the next level. Shortly after that it started to put together 'generic' tenders, which involves tendering for all of the transport contracts at a particular centre. At the time, each vehicle attending a particular centre had its own stand-alone contract, but G-Line tendered for the entire contract. The aim was to offer a complete service – if any one vehicle had a problem then any of the other vehicles on the contract could cover the work. G-Line designed the routes spider's-web style, getting all the clients into the centres as quickly as possible. The business was extremely successful, operating 35 vehicles and employing 40 staff at its height.

Around four years ago G-Line quickly noticed that it was not being re-awarded contracts, and that Section 19 operators were starting to pick them up. The drip soon turned into a deluge: G-Line now has 11 vehicles and 12 staff.

Renault's new Master class

Renault is launching a new 'Commercial Passenger Vehicle' (CPV) range based on its Master and Trafic platforms.

The new 'factory specification' range includes four new products offering seating for between six and 16 occupants, with basic prices from £15,963 (excluding VAT).

The Trafic nine-seat and the Master six, nine and 16-seats, are claimed to benefit from the good, car-like driving characteristics taken from the rest of the Trafic and Master ranges.

Renault is aiming to capture a 10 per cent share of the UK minibus market – which accounts for around 8,000 sales per year. Sales of the Trafic SL27dCi 100 and SL29dCi 100 nine-seat versions are expected to be the best-sellers of the 16 versions available across both ranges.

The nine-seat Master will be key in Renault's bid to capture 10 per cent of the UK minibus market

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TRAVELGREEN COACHES of DONCASTER

Travelgreen of Doncaster has been operating for 25 years and runs six vehicles, from eight to 33 seats.

The company renews its fleet every two years and its latest addition is an Esker Riada minicoach finished in the company's burgundy and white livery.

Managing director Dave Green said: "I am extremely pleased with the Riada, which has exceeded our expectations in many respects: the quality of the build, the luggage capacity and in particular the fuel economy.

"It is returning 20mpg which, considering that most of the time we are fully loaded with luggage, is excellent. Drivers and passengers alike are equally impressed.

"In 25 years of operating I have never received customer service to match it. Danny McGee even took time out to speak with me himself to ensure I was happy - he has clearly put together a first class team."

Travelgreen's vehicles are mainly used on corporate and private hire.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body: Mercedes-Benz 616CDi/ Esker Riada
Engine: OM612
Transmission: 5-speed manual
Seats: 22
Spec: Three-point belts, extra-dark tint double-glazed windows, air con, radio/ PA/CD autochanger, Euroliner wheeltrims
Bought from: Esker Bus and Coach

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Big business from Intelligent Transportation Technology

System schedules, route and fare data for US dial-a-ride

German transportation software specialist INIT is aiming to making slicing through the gridlock of Manhattan a doddle.

The firm has signed a contract with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of New York to equip Access-a-Ride vehicles operated by MTA New York City Transit's Department of Buses Paratransit Division with Intelligent Transportation Technology.

INIT received the contract, worth more than $16m (£9.1m) because its systems met the submission criteria and the company has over 20 years experience in Automatic Vehicle Location Management (AVLM).

The AVLM installation is projected to take two and a half years and will allow more efficient real-time control and optimisation of the paratransit service using the Global Positioning Satellite System (GPS) and a wireless data communication network.

The Paratransit Division provides door-to-door transportation for people who cannot use accessible buses or subways. It has an average weekday ridership of 14,732 trips (All Boardings). Initially, 1,329 Access-a-Ride vehicles will be equipped with COPILOTpc, the latest generation of on-board computers, using Windows XP embedded technology.

Mobile Data Terminals provide drivers with an easy to use graphical colour touch screen. Accurate vehicle positioning in urban canyons, much like lower Manhattan, is a challenge due to limited visibility of GPS satellites and signal reflections off tall buildings.

To solve this problem INIT combines GPS with a gyroscope sensor. In addition, a highly sophisticated algorithm matches the computed position to the street network. This allows for accurate positioning even when GPS signals are obstructed.

Vehicle's location information will be transmitted over a Wireless Data Communication network, updating at regular intervals. Data is translated into an explicit street level map displayed on Command Centre terminals.

The on-board MDT displays a map showing the route for the driver to follow based on the trip manifest. Visual and audible turn-by-turn navigation support is given to the driver.

The MDT will also be used for two-way text messaging and display updates between the driver and the Paratransit Command Centre. In addition, the real time information provided on the location of the entire fleet by the AVLM system will provide dispatchers with the ability to re-route vehicles in response to customer, driver and vehicle emergencies.

INIT's comprehensive system also records mileage, fares and passenger pick-up and drop off times.

The MDT will provide drivers with multi-functional mapping capabilities that will assist in reduction of pick-up point confusion and missed appointments due to no-shows. INIT believes that the AVLM installation will help to improve quality of service and customer satisfaction.

The INIT product family, MOBILE, consists of CAD/AVL software and hardware, data and voice radio systems, next stops display and announcement systems, scheduling software for Fixed-Route and Paratransit service, real-time passenger information at stops or via Internet, TSP (Traffic Signal Priority), APC (Automated Passenger Counting), etc.

Due to its modular design, MOBILE can be used as a stand-alone system or be integrated with other third-party systems.

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INIT's deal with the New York Transportation Authority is worth more than £9 million

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2001 '51' - Merc Sprinter 413dci Excel, panoramic windows, coach back end with dropwell boot, 3 point belts, individual forced air/reading lights, luggage racks, skirts. **£22,500**

1996 'N' - Merc Sprinter 412cdi Olympus, 3 point all age inertia belts, webasto heating, luggage racks. **£7,500**

1992 'K' - Merc 410D Autobus, coach back end with small boot, 3 point all age inertia belts, luggage racks. **£3,250**

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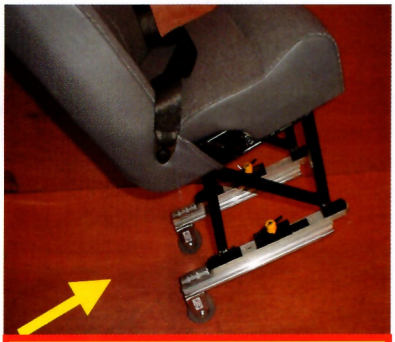

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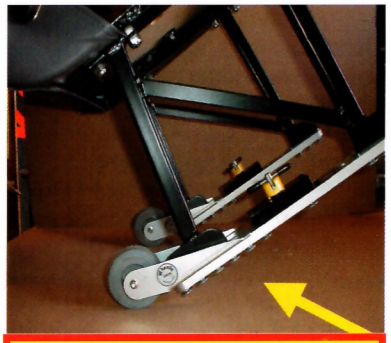

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Learning about the fax of life

Technology is conspiring against Archer...

Since Alexander Graham Bell uttered the first words over it, the phone has been a mixed blessing. Ninety nine per cent of most coach operator's work comes in over it, and its basic technical concept makes PA systems, CD players and the like in their coaches possible. That's the up-side.

On the down-side, customers use it to complain vociferously about apparent trivialities, drivers use it to tell us when they think things are going pear-shaped out on the road – even though they usually aren't – and quite often it won't stop ringing all day because of the weight of in-coming business (which can be a frustrating obstacle to us getting our work done on jobs we've already taken on, even though it's good for turnover).

Mobile phones have also compounded the down-side. I used to have just one phone on my desk – the landline – now I've got three (my own mobile, the company's one and the landline too). They have an uncanny knack of ringing simultaneously!

That said, although phones – and, even more so, troublesome fax machines – can put you in the mire pretty quickly, intelligently used, mobiles can get you out of it double-quick; and in ways inconceivable a generation ago too. Consider the following.

At a very busy time a remote office of a multi-national, who we do a lot of business with locally, rang to make a short notice booking. They'd been recommended to us by their local office (I liked that). Our person who dealt with them leapt at the chance of them faxing an order over for the job together with a full itinerary since that would save them time, gave our fax number, forgot to take the caller's contact details and thought their job was nearly done.

Enter troublesome fax machine; which had happily churned out junk faxes all day without problems. A sheet of paper began to pass through then a noise went off like a starting pistol firing and everything stopped. Print ribbon broken: all we'd received was the top left hand corner of the multi-national's fax header! We hadn't even got the number of the machine it came from.

To change the ribbon we had to remove this sheet, which cleared 'print from memory' on our fax machine, so we never got the fax at all. We rang their local office, spoke to our contact there and hoped she could put us in touch with the hirer. "Oh, I recommend you to everybody," she said (and I liked that even more, although it was hardly helpful at the time!). We were now looking for a needle in a haystack!

We convened an urgent scheduling meeting the following morning and concluded that the only way round this problem was to use what little information we had from notes of the quotation we'd given (which had been immediately accepted – I liked that too!) to position a vehicle somewhere near where the pick-up might be and just tell the driver to cruise around a bit until we rang his mobile with the full SP after we'd had the anticipated "Where's my coach got to" phone call (oh, and make sure he was wired up "hands free" too!). So that's what we did.

> **"In the pre-mobile era, no coach operator could have pulled this one off..."**

We got that call when our coach was just 10 minutes late picking up, explained the situation to them, got a replacement fax sent to us (on a light day for junk faxes fortunately, so the machine still had plenty of ribbon and we actually got it!). Then we rang our driver's mobile to give him the details and found that by chance he was just around the corner from the pick-up!

Consequently we were only 15 minutes late for a job we knew we had but knew next to nothing about. Reputation saved, if not enhanced! Since forewarned is forearmed, I'd also given our driver a photocopy of the original abortive fax we'd received, so he could show it to anyone who complained about his lateness. Someone did, but I'm told he was deflated rapidly by what he was shown: proof that one of our drivers had apparently found a party using a virtually blank sheet of paper!

In the pre-mobile era, no coach operator could have pulled this one off; at least not as speedily as we did. Mind you, in the pre-fax era they wouldn't have found themselves in this hole either. So thank you Alexander Graham Bell, you got us off the hook big-time.

Empire built

Paul Flisher

It's been a busy year at Buzzlines. Marketing boss Paul Flisher, and the rest of the crew, tell *CBW* news editor Andrew Peace what's been going on, and what they've got coming up

"I should think the industry is getting a little bit teed off with seeing Buzzlines this and Buzzlines that," says Paul Flischer, the man charged with plotting Buzzlines' future.

"I want to move away from, 'We're Buzzlines, we're brilliant, we do everything for everybody'. I want to come from a different angle and say, 'Ok we're Buzzlines and we can do that', but I also want to say 'this is what we can offer the industry'."

In 16 years, Nigel and Kathryn Busbridge have built the company up from a single vehicle to 65, and now service virtually every niche in the coaching industry, from private hire, contracts and school work to breakdowns and touring work. The list goes on. Buzzlines is very aware of its strengths and also understands the need to broaden its horizons.

The biggest and most recent example of this is the company's breakdown service. Last November Buzzlines became an official breakdown partner of Evobus, the first step towards becoming a main agent for all Evobus servicing and repairs. But Flisher is keen to emphasise that its breakdown service is not exclusively for Mercedes-Benz or Setra owners.

"We do breakdowns not only for Evobus but for anybody else that has a problem with a vehicle in our area," says Flisher. "The workshop is open 24 hours a day to keep our vehicles serviced and inspected, but also for anybody else. What I'm trying to get at is that we are more than just a bog standard coach company that runs up and down the country. We are here 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year for the UK coach industry. And also, with the Evobus tie up, for continental operators and inbound as well.

"It is an integral development, the company has deliberately moved down the road of developing services for other operators. We've always been proactive in this, but the tie up with Evobus has taken us that stage further."

More services

The breakdown side is the highest profile service Buzzlines is currently offering, but may turn out to be the thin end of the wedge.

"Because the company has grown to the size it is, the other thing that has come out of that is the need for training," Flisher says. "We are very proactive with the new training needs of the industry, whether it be the new tachograph or the drivers' hours legislation. We as a company have tried to be one step ahead so we can be prepared when the legislation comes in."

The upshot of that is that the company has established an in-house training department, and plans eventually to offer these services to other operators. But the external services do not stop there.

"Something else we are looking at is CRB checking," he says.

"Filling in a CRB form is, and could be seen as, a minefield. We've got the experts here, because we do it all the time we know how these things work. Other coach companies that may not be as big as we are would struggle. We are offering them a service where we will help complete CRB forms for their drivers. We're the only company which will appear on the official CRB website as a company which is able to take in other company's forms."

Drivers

Buzzlines fill out CRB forms all the time because all its drivers are CRB checked to enhanced level before they even turn a wheel. Because of the driver shortage many companies could understandably shy away from being too rigorous in their selection procedures, but Buzzlines is meeting the problem head-on.

"I know the industry is not exactly awash with drivers," says Flisher, "but we are a leading coach company and we have to lead from the front. That is why we do it, we want the best - we invest the best part of £250,000 in the vehicles we have out there."

Offering drivers training has benefits other than keeping them all up-to-date with the latest developments.

"It's quite an extensive training programme we run here for the drivers, to see how they are coping with the ups and downs and the rigours of the industry. Because again, the company policy, and I use the word loosely, is that we are a caring sharing company.

"It doesn't matter how good we are at getting the work and building the company profile, at the end of the day it's those guys that drive out of here to do the job and we want to be sure that every aspect of their job is done well, and that they are feeling well doing it. There's nothing worse than a

Nigel and Kathryn Busbridge: from 0-65 in 16 years

disgruntled workforce sitting in the yard looking at us over here thinking 'I'm just about to go out of here for 15 days what do they care once I'm out of the yard?' But that's not how it is.

"We as a company pride ourselves that our driver training and our driver concern is paramount - a happy workforce makes our life a lot easier. It's part of the way the company is going, we are more than just a coach company."

2005 was a busy year

The Evobus contract was not the only major development at Buzzlines last year. The company also made some significant acquisitions in the tour market.

Flisher explained: "Up until March last year we were making a fair percentage growth year on year. We looked at the pricing structure, we looked at where we were going, what contracts we'd got and everything else. We thought the company needed a new direction so we took over an old established company, Kent & Sussex. We also took over En Route, a short break specialist, which gives us the perfect marketing arm to create our own tour and excursion programme."

There are now two stand-alone companies under the Buzzlines umbrella: Buzzlines Coaches, based at the main Lympne Industrial Estate site, with an off-shoot in Sandwich and Surrey to service a major contract; and Buzzlines Travel at Red Lion Square in Hythe, three miles down the road.

Having established a tour side, the company then set about finding more business in the sector.

"Sales manager Trevor Smith and I were given a brief from Nigel. He said, 'I don't want to see any of my vehicles in the yard'. So we went out in September last year and secured two major tour companies for 2006."

Those companies are The Newmarket Group and Travelscope. Both companies sent tour operators on Buzzlines' tours in December and were apparently both so impressed with the vehicles and the standard of service that they both offered tours, meaning Buzzlines were running out of coaches. It was a nice problem to have, solved with the imminent arrival of some more new Setras.

What next?

After a year like that, you might think the company would want some time to consolidate, but Flisher reveals that Buzzlines, as ever, has its eye on the next opportunity.

"At the end of the day," he says, "2006 is looking like one of the best years we've ever had, certainly on the tour side, without really trying. But we're not complacent. We're looking at 2007/8 already to see where we're going from there."

And beyond that? "We're actively involved in various schemes, we're looking at how we are going to be involved in the Olympics - that's how far we are looking into the future.

"The figures they are talking about in terms of mass movement for the Olympics is phenomenal, and we want to be in there. We've got in through various doors that have opened to us and we are up there with the other guys that are pitching as well. And I'm sure that come 2012 we'll be there whether it be with a team or whatever."

So plans are being made long term. Where does Flisher think the company will end up? "In 1990 Nigel and Kathryn started the company with a single coach. From then, if you plot where the company has gone, where is it going to finish up? We've got the rolling stock, we've got the engineering side near enough where we want it, the staff selection is almost where we want it, and then we've got the tour side too. So the company is only going one way - top gear forward." ›

So, is Nigel taking a back seat?

No, is the short answer to that. Both Nigel and Kathryn – with accountant Mike Kuske – are still very much hands on.

Nigel said: "I'm probably more involved in the business than I was 12 months ago, but you've got to give people the rope to do the job. But you can take a step back too far, so I make sure our customers and big contracts are getting what they want, and – hopefully – more besides."

Much was made last year of Nigel getting his pilot's licence, with many people wondering if the next big idea would be Buzz Airlines. He says it was a 'kind of' midlife crisis – he had bought himself a Porsche 911 Turbo but was hardly driving it. So he traded it in and learned to fly instead. "There's an awful lot to flying a plane," he says, "I enjoy the challenge and especiallly the whole theory side of it."

The next big thing according to Nigel is green transport. "More and more companies are worried about the environment. We need to educate them that we are offering the most environmentally friendly way to get to work."

He says it is important, after conducting an in-house survey, that schools get the message too. "Nigh on 85 per cent are only concerned with price. The environment came lowest of the lot. That's frightening.

"These people educating our children are telling them that cheap is best."

Broken down? Derek's your man

Buzzlines coach technician Derek Catchpole says his job requires a delicate balance.

"Coach technicians are a different breed – lorry technicians think we are inbred. They have only got three seatbelts to check – we've got in excess of 70. We've got to be safety-orientated for the passengers, but also have to inspect for cleanliness. So we're not only the technicians, we've got to be orientated around the passengers too.

"We've got apprenticeships, because we think its going to become a dying trade. We can see the whole country coming to a standstill because nobody wants to get their hands dirty. But you also need to be able to use a computer. Lots of our guys have been on a computer course, because most vehicle diagnostics are computer-orientated now and we carry a computer around with us."

The latest addition to the Buzzlines fleet is a LWB Mercedes-Benz Sprinter van, used as a quick response breakdown vehicle. It is fully kitted-out with air con and sat nav, but also a full-size compressor so they can do bigger jobs at the side of the road.

Catchpole continued: "If somebody phones and says they have a coach with a problem our first question is always 'has it got passengers on it?'. The next question is, 'what are you going to do with the passengers?'. We can supply another coach, or get the nearest coach company to do it if they can't do it themselves. We won't force ourselves on the customer, we let them make the decision. Because we are in the industry, it is not like a main agent that just treats it as a vehicle – we know what they want and that's what we give them.

"All the customer has to do is make one phone call and

Meet the Buzzlines team

Trevor Smith has been in the coach industry for 16 years – first as a driver and now as a sales manager for Buzzlines. Last year the company became the main sponsor of Folkestone Invicta FC, and the stadium was renamed the Buzzlines Stadium.

Buzzlines is not immune to the driver shortage, but will not risk its reputation, or its vehicles, on sub-standard drivers.

Prospective drivers have to complete a rigorous application form, and they are all CRB checked to enhanced level. The firm concentrates as much on retaining its existing drivers as finding new ones – it offers them comprehensive training and makes a big effort to make drivers, and all employees, feel part of the team.

Buzzlines has an accelerated insurance scheme which allows 21-year-old drivers, but, says human resource manager Bernard Rudge, left: "This industry just is not attracting new drivers."

Buzzlines takes training seriously enough to have appointed a training manager – Peter Bovington. Sooner rather than later, this section will offer its services to other operators. For now, Peter is busy enough with the company's 70 plus drivers, like getting them all through their Institute of Advanced Drivers test. Hottest item on the agenda though is digitachs. All the drivers have cards now. The next thing to tackle is the card reading equipment.

then they don't need to worry about anything else. They just need to say we've got a coach broken down in, say, Germany. Leave it with us, we'll sort it out. We'll explain to them the costs of getting it recovered, either to here or the costs straight to them too.

"If we can we repair it - superb. If we can't, we will stay with that vehicle until the recovery has turned up - once it has then that is the end of our part.

"We've got quite a big parts store. Evobus and a few other suppliers have put impress stocks in. Most of the breakdown parts are things like airbags and silly little items. We've been doing it quite a while now, so we know what to keep in stock. But, nine times out of 10, the parts are OK, we can get them, or if not then we can get them the next day. If it's a problem part we'll keep the coach here. But we are in constant contact with the customer. It might be three or four in the morning, but they like to know. They might not get any sleep but they know what's going on, same as me - I don't care what time it is, I want to know what's happening with that vehicle.

"We like to say we'll get to someone within 60-90 minutes. In 60 minutes you can get quite a long way, and we will go abroad - we've had customers who have knocked a mirror off in the South of France and we will go there.

"We're not full breakdown partners, but it feels like we are. The full partnership is like being a main agent, we are not to that degree yet - we will in the future, hopefully, progress and once we are up to speed with the technology we'll go into full breakdown and workshop facilities too.

"At the moment our workshop just does our own servicing and repairs and breakdowns."

The issue every operator in Kent is talking about it is KCC Passenger Services – the county council's commercial coach operation. With KCC's website now openly advertising for all types of customer, accountant Mike Kuske wonders where it will end: "KCC is now actively marketing in the private hire sector, on the main county council website, and for all private hire – it doesn't say just for schools. And if Kent can do it, every council can do it." He has written to Michael Howard, the local MP. Howard replied to say he would be taking it up with KCC themselves.

Tara Busbridge, the management accountant, pictured with her closest office friend – she is just getting her head round Distinctive Systems accounting software. Tara and accounts clerk Kate Allen – along with Mike Kuske on the opposite end of the landing – are the recent occupiers of an as yet bare and unpainted third floor. Buzzlines' accounts department cannot quite match the 24/7 availability of the engineering side, but it is open six days a week.

Operations manager Gary Creasey shares an office with Paul Flisher and oversees the complete running of all Buzzlines operations. He has been with Buzzlines for 12 years, but has been in the coaching industry for his entire career.

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The lease of your worries...

Stuart Darlington's tips on how to avoid being stung by costly rental debts

Stuart Darlington is a commercial real estate lawyer in London Law Firm, Davenport Lyons

Many coach and bus operators run their businesses from leased premises, and as an option for development, keeping the capital for the working parts of your business can make sound sense.

But commercial leases can contain many hidden and costly pitfalls, the impact of which often only become apparent when it is too late, leaving behind a sizeable dent in your profit or exerting unnecessary pressure on your cash flow. The key to avoiding problems is negotiating your new lease obligations with your landlord at the outset.

Financial considerations

1 RENT. Are you paying the market rent for the type of premises in the area? Try negotiating a rent-free period at the start of the lease for a number of months. Your solicitor should be able to recommend a good agent to you who should be able to advise you.

2 RENT REVIEW. If the lease is for longer than three or four years the landlord will most likely require that the rent is 'reviewed'. The most common current form of review is on an 'upwards only' basis on the anniversary of every fifth year. With this type of review the rent will not go down but will either remain the same or will be increased in line with the market for similar premises in the area.

Obviously, this creates business planning problems as it is impossible to predict any market rise in lease rents years ahead.

As an alternative you may consider seeking to negotiate fixed, stepped increases in rent where the increase is set out at the outset of the lease, or that the rent will be increased annually by the increase in the Retail Prices Index (RPI). The down side is that these alternatives would guarantee rental increases where rent may not otherwise have increased pursuant to a market-led rent review process, where the market has not risen. Such is the price of certainty.

3 STAMP DUTY. Land Tax is often overlooked at the financial planning stages when considering taking a new lease. Generally, Stamp Duty Land Tax is payable upon the grant of a new lease at the rate of 1% on the aggregate rent over the term. Additionally, if the lease is more than five years in length and provides for a rent review upon the fifth anniversary, if that rent review results in an increase of rent of more than five per cent plus RPI, there may also be an additional Stamp Duty Land Tax liability at that time. This is a complex area and you should consult your solicitor, as fines are payable for failure to comply.

4 SERVICE CHARGE. Where the premises are part of a larger building or estate, the landlord will seek to recover its cost of repair and maintenance of the unlet parts from the tenants via a service charge, of which you will pay a proportionate part of the total costs. There are a great many ways of providing in the lease how your contribution will be calculated, whether by way of a fixed charge or calculated on the proportion that the area occupied by each tenant bears to the total lettable area. However, to truly control your financial position and achieve certainty it is wise to seek a cap on the total annual amount the landlord can charge you through the service charge, although landlords often resist such a cap.

Expensive Obligations

1 REPAIR. Typically, you will be obliged to keep the premises in a good state of repair and condition. Whether or not the heads of terms or the lease state if expressly this includes an obligation to put the premises into good repair if they are not already in that state. To exclude this obligation you should require that the lease is subject to a 'schedule of condition'. This means that you will not be obligated to maintain the premises in any better state of repair and condition than as at the date of the grant of the lease. A photographic record will need to be compiled evidencing the condition of the premises at the outset.

In any event a survey and inspection is always recommended to ascertain any disrepair for which you would be responsible which may be costly. Your solicitor should be able to recommend a good surveyor to you.

2 FIT OUT. Tenants almost always wish to fit out the premises before or during their occupation. Commonly leases allow only internal non-structural alterations provided the landlord's consent and approval is formally obtained before the works are carried out. However, this is not always the case and some leases are more restrictive. You need to consider whether the works to be permitted by the lease will allow you to fulfil your needs.

continued on page 32

3 DILAPIDATIONS. At the end of the term, the lease will usually require that you remove your fit-out works and any other alterations you have carried out (unless your landlord notifies you otherwise), make good any disrepair at the premises and decorate them in colours and materials approved by the landlord. This obligation can be costly and is often overlooked at the outset when planning lease costs.

4 INSURANCE. Usually, your landlord will maintain buildings insurance, of which you will be required to contribute a proportionate part of the costs. However, you will require your own contents and public and employers liability insurance. You may also be required to effect plate glass insurance (for retail shop premises) or plant and machinery insurance (such as for air conditioning apparatus) for offices. However, there is always one hidden point which you should address. Most leases do not require the landlord to insure against damage by terrorism, risks against which insurance cannot be obtained in the insurance market or against exclusions, limitations and excesses imposed by the landlord's insurer.

As your obligation to repair does not apply, and the rent will be suspended, in the event of damage by risks against which the landlord is insured this means that there is a 'gap' where damage is caused by risks against which the landlord has not or could not insure or by such exclusions as above. Accordingly, you will be liable to repair any damage, and the rent will not be suspended, notwithstanding that the premises are incapable of use. Therefore, you need to ensure that damage by such "uninsured risks" will be excluded from your obligation to repair.

Flexibility

1 TERM. The term of the lease is fundamental to your flexibility. Too short and you may need to move premises too soon and expend unnecessary funds on fitting out. Too long and you may outgrow the premises, or they become a burden if you need to down size.

It is common for tenants to negotiate a reasonably long term, with a right for the tenant (only) to terminate the lease at regular intervals when it is felt the tenant may need to review its property needs (for example a 10-year lease with a right to break at years three and seven). The precise combination is dependant upon your needs and what your landlord will agree.

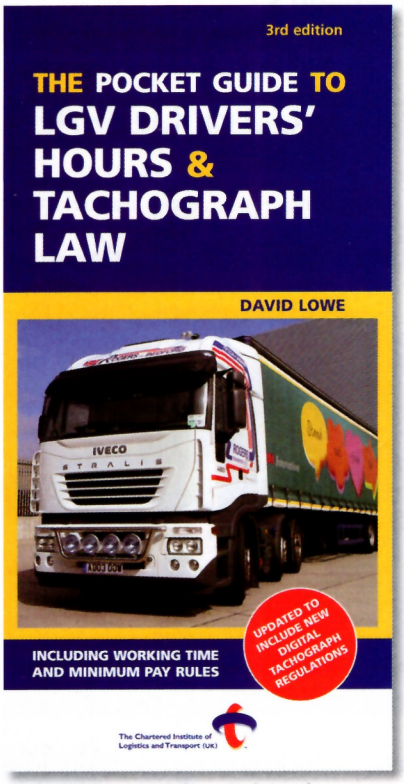
Great care must also be taken when exercising your right to break, as even the smallest failure to comply with any requirements as to the service of notice to exercise this right may result in losing your entitlement. It is always recommended that this is undertaken by a solicitor.

2 LEASE DISPOSAL. To increase flexibility and reduce your losses where the whole or any part of the premises are surplus to requirements you must ensure that you are at least permitted to sell on (assign) your lease (although landlord's will never allow the assignment of less than the whole). Preferably your lease should also allow subletting of the whole of the premises, and ideally any parts capable of being sublet.

3 USE. Obviously the use to be permitted by the lease should correspond to the use to which you will put the premises. In addition the use should be as wide as possible. If it is too restrictive or expressed to be personal to you or to your specific type of business (for example for use as a solicitors office, rather than just general office use) it will effectively stop you from disposing of your lease to any other who does not carry on precisely the same business as you.

Remember also that no matter what use the lease may allow you must make sure that such use is that permitted under planning legislation. Otherwise the Local Planning Authority will have power to prevent use of the premises for anything other than the permitted planning use, but you will be unlikely to be able to terminate your lease and you will continue to be bound to pay the lease rent notwithstanding that the premises are incapable of use.

The above are general points to consider when negotiating your main lease. You should always consult your solicitor to advise you on the more specific considerations in your particular circumstances and to negotiate the content of your lease for you.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Digital tachograph law explained

Drivers' hours law made simple

Publisher Kogan Page has produced a pocket guide to the latest drivers' hours regulations.

'The Pocket Guide to LGV Drivers' Hours & Tachograph Law' updates the previous version which was published in March 2005 and contains all the new digital tachograph regulations, working time and minimum pay rules. The publication is endorsed by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport.

The book sets out to unravel the complications of the new regulations and clarifies:

- Which rules apply to which drivers
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- The law on and use of digital smartcards

Written by David Lowe, an experienced author in transport and logistics, the book retails at £12.99 in paperback form and should be available at most good book shops. Alternatively, it can be purchased direct from the publisher: Kogan Page, 120 Pentonville Road, London N1 9JN.

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Cornwall gets smart

Unicard has been selected at the 'smart scheme' provider which will manage concessionary fares on behalf of Cornwall County Council and its six district councils.

The scheme will replace the existing Pathfinder Project and will provide Cornish citizens with a low-cost, simple to use contactless smartcard for use on public transport. The same card has the option to be used in county libraries.

Potentially, Unicard can extend the facilities covered by the card but this will be resisted until such time as people have become familiar and confident with the technology.

Over 60s and people with disabilities can apply for the smartcards at any of the 31 libraries in the county. They will be marketed as 'Buses in Cornwall Concessionary Passes'.

Library staff will make an online application for the card and it will be processed and sent directly to the applicant's home address.

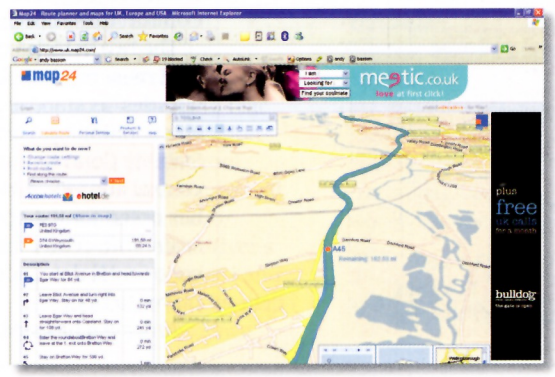
The scheme uses Mifare-based smart cards and is claimed to be both rugged and highly reliable. Its contactless communication with ticketing equipment and card readers means users only have to pass it in front of the device for a transaction to be made. It also provides the driver with instant confirmation of the passenger's validity for obtaining concessionary travel.

- **Call: 01202 850810**

E-mail: *pv@unicard-uk.com*

3D route planning software

Mapsolute claims to be the first internet mapping provider to create a free three dimensional viewing option on its route planning site at *www.map24.com*



This feature gives users a unique perspective of their route from above and also provides a wealth of interactive information on surrounding roads, landmarks, petrol stations and parking information.

All this scrolls into view as the route is 'driven' on screen. Road names and numbers, plus the miles left to travel are continually updated. It also allows users to zoom in and out to check on their exact location in the grand scheme of the whole route.

The 3D route planner is an integral feature of the new 5.1 version of MapTP, the core software at the heart of all Mapsolute products.

Current licensees include DaimlerChrysler, T-Mobile, RAC and McDonalds

- Call 0870 8503364

E-mail *info@mapsolute.co.uk*

Stertil lift ideal for steam cleaning

Stertil UK has installed a parallelogram OMER Vega 240 lift for steam cleaning and chassis preparation at Volvo Truck & Bus in Broxburn, near Edinburgh.

Measuring 8m long and with a capacity of 24 tonnes, the electro-hydraulic lift system is already well proven technology with the benefit of a narrow footprint of little more than the vehicle's track width.

The OMER Vega's construction allows operators unhindered access as there are no cross-beams linking the platforms. Reliability on the lift is aided by having all pivoting parts of the mechanism fixed to the frame. Stertil claims this eliminates any tendancy for rollers to seize or to 'flat-spot' - common complaints with scissor-type lifts.

- Call: 0870 770 6607

Deliveries

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

JOHN FLANAGAN COACH TRAVEL

John Flanagan Coach Travel from Warrington in Cheshire has taken delivery of a Mercedes Esker Touring from Harry Fergusons.

In keeping with Flanagan's style (*CBW*, August 18, 2005), the 39-seater coach is equipped with a wheelchair lift and the capacity to carry five wheelchairs. It complements the rest of the John Flanagan fleet, which is all wheelchair accessible, and fills a gap in the mid-size range.

The company says it is ideally sized for smaller groups with wheelchair users and schools' outings, with space to accommodate a class of children and several helpers comfortably.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body: Mercedes-Benz Atego/Esker Touring
Engine: M-B 231bhp
Transmission: Manual six-speed
Seats: 39
Spec: Lift, DVD, aircon
Bought from: Esker Bus and Coach 0287 964 2008

ARDCAVAN COACH TOURS

IRISH operator Ardcavan Coach Tours, based in Wexford, have taken two Setra S415 GT HD Comfort Class coaches.

The two vehicles come with most of the 'bells and whistles' as standard, including air conditioning, Electronic Stability Control, traction control and EBS. Ardcavan has opted for the optimum 49 seats, with centre toilet and continental door, adding DVD player to both.

Ardcavan has a particular market in mind with its Setras – inbound foreign tourists. Ardcavan's Philip O'Leary. said: "They demand very high standards, and that's what led us to invest in Setras."

The company bought its first Setra in 2001, and bought them again in 2002 and 2003. These are its first Comfort Class Setras, offering a hefty 420bhp, 12-litre engine, independent front suspension, and disc brakes all round.

One of the bonuses as far as Ardcavan is concerned is the Europe-wide OmniPlus aftersales package offered by EvoBus. O'Leary added: "Good back-up on the road is vital to a business such as ours. If we do encounter a problem we need to know it will be addressed quickly and efficiently."

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body: Setra S415 GT HD 12.2 metres, integral
Engine: Mercedes OM457LA 12-litre, 420bhp
Transmission: AS-Tronic
Seats: 49
Spec: Air con, centre toilet, ESP, ASR, EBS, DVD player
Bought from: EvoBus (UK) 02476 626000

Translink keeps big order in Northern Ireland

WRIGHTBUS has been the beneficiary of an order for 110 single-deckers being delivered to state-owned Translink.

The £8 million tender secures a new fleet of Wrightbus Solars built on Scania's L94UB chassis, most getting a 44-seat plus 32 standee configuration for general work through the province, but six heading for Airbus services to Belfast International Airport – a fair distance from the city – have 40 seats and a generous luggage pen.

Translink chief executive Keith Moffat said: "The tender process took account of a number of factors including quality and design of the product, price and after-market support. The combination of Wrightbus Solar and Scania chassis represented the closest match to our tender requirements."

He added that the existing Solars in the fleet have proven their worth, being reliable, and getting positive feedback from passengers and drivers.

Translink has added LED destination equipment and six CCTV cameras to the specification. The chassis sports a 230bhp engine driving through a ZF automatic gearbox.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body: Mercedes-Benz 081D/ Esker Riada
Engine: Mercedes-Benz
Transmission: Manual
Seats: 33
Spec: Coach seats, CD
Bought from: Esker Bus and Coach 0287 964 2008

IAN'S MIDI COACHES of CARLISLE

Ian's Midicoaches of Carlisle started trading with one 37-seat Leyland Swift in January 2002 – now it has a fleet of four minibuses ranging from 24 to 27 seats.

Its latest addition is a 24-seat Mercedes-Benz 814D/ KVC minicoach conversion.

It is a highly specified vehicle coming as standard with ABS, high-backed coach seats with three-point belts and radio/CD. To suit its use on private hire and a contract with a major service station, Ian's Midicoaches has specified mahogany-effect rack ledges, Euroliner wheeltrims and tow bar and trailer socket.

CLARKSONS COACHES of SOUTH ELMSALL

Clarksons Coaches of South Elmsall, West Yorkshire, has just taken delivery of its second Mercedes-Benz Touro, and has another on order for delivery this spring.

Director Paul Clarkson said: "The Mercedes is a pleasure to drive, and the three-pointed star on the front always impresses our customers."

Where the company's existing Touro is dedicated to Leger tour work, and is in Leger's livery, the latest coach is used on Clarkson's own tour and charter programme and is in the company's distinctive two-tone blue colour scheme with matching blue interior trim.

The new Touro is to a broadly similar specification to the company's existing coach, a top-specification 49-seater with sunken washroom, air con and twin DVD monitors.

Clarkson added: "Our first Touro has given us good service and impressed our customers, which is why we have added a second and ordered a third."

Clarksons Coaches was formed in 1959 and is proud to have CoachMarque accreditation.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body: Mercedes-Benz Touro integral
Engine: 354bhp 12-litre OM457HLA
Transmission: automatic
Seats: 49
Spec: Sunken washroom, air con, DVD
Bought from: Evobus (UK) 02476 626000

COSGROVE TRAVEL SERVICES

Cosgrove Travel Services has added a 33-seat Esker Riada executive midicoach to its varied 10-vehicle fleet.

Based on the Mercedes-Benz 0815D chassis, the Riada is extensively equipped, featuring ABS, high back coach seats with retractable three-point belts, pneumatically operated driver's window, large panoramic bonded single-glazed windows with extra dark tint, underfloor side luggage lockers with slam doors and side access doors to rear luggage bay, convection radiators, electric roof mounted extractor, forced air ventilation, radio/ cassette/ PA with driver's pedestal and courier hand microphones, courier map reading light, Euroliner wheeltrims and, finally, wood effect to dashboard. It will be mainly used on private hires and tours.

Cosgrove Travel Services was established by John Cosgrove in 1967 with one 51-seat coach and a minibus.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body: Mercedes-Benz 814D/ KVC minicoach conversion
Engine: Mercedes-Benz 136bhp
Transmission: Manual
Seats: 24
Spec: Mahogany effect rack ledges, Euroliner wheeltrims, belts, electric door
Bought from: Esker Bus and Coach 0287 964 2008

IRVINGS COACH HIRE

AT 13 metres, this Bova Futura integral can carry as many as 55 of Irvings or Carlisle's customers in comfort.

The extra-long Future FHD 13.340XE coach is equipped with part-leather upholstery and adjustable footrests, air conditioning, Webasto pre-heater, ASR traction control, water boiler, radio/CD and additional four marker lights front and rear. For additional safety, it has a reversing camera. Irvings has opted for the ZF 5HP602 automatic gearbox to smooth the ride for passengers. Irvings has retained the distinctive V11 BUS registration plate.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body: Bova Futura FHD 13.340XE integral
Engine: 340bhp
Transmission: ZF automatic
Seats: 53/55
Spec: Air con, ASR, EBS, CD player
Bought from: Moseley (PCV) 01977 609000

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T REG IVECO 59.12

2.8 DIESEL TURBO, MELLOR COACHBUILT BODY, P A S, 16 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, PLS FULLY AUTOMATIC TAIL LIFT, FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, LOW MILES 66,000 KMS

V REG MERCEDES SPRINTER 410D

TURBO DIESEL, PAS, LWB, HIGH ROOF, MELLOR CONVERSION, FRONT ENTRY SIDE DOOR WITH LOW STEP, 15 REMOVABLE HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RATCLIFFE UNDER-FLOOR TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER, CHOICE.

1996 P REG MERCEDES 609D

WADHAM COACHBUILT BODY,LWB, P A S, FULL HEIGHT DOOR,16 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S OR 6 WHEEL CHAIRS & 4 SEATED, UNWIN TRACKING,RATCLIFF TAIL LIFT, EBERSPACHER HEATER, EX LOCAL COUNCIL ,GOOD CONDITION

X REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DIESEL, 5 SPEED, PAS, LONG WHEEL BASE, HIGH ROOF, SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 12 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, V GOOD CONDITION, ONE OWNER

Y REG 2001 VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER

2.5TDI AUTOMATIC, POWERED STEERING, MWB, SIDE LOADING DOOR, 5 SEATS PLUS 1 WHEELCHAIR, UNWIN TRACKING, WITH SIDE MOUNTED RICON TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER, MINT CONDITION, 33,000 MILES

1999 T REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DIESEL ,5 SPEED ,PAS, L W B, EUROMOTIVE CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 11 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS , UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, 52,000 MILES. V GOOD CONDITION , ONE OWNER

X REG 2001 FORD TRANSIT 2.5 TD

MANUAL,CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BODY, PAS, 12 REMOVABLE HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 63,000 MILES CHOICE OF TWO

2000 V REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DIESEL ,5 SPEED ,PAS, L W B, EXCEL CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 12 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS , UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, V GOOD CONDITION, ONE OWNER

51 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT28

2.5 TURBO DIESEL, PAS, SHORT WHEEL BASE, LOW ROOF, TWIN SIDE LOADING DOORS WITH STEP,8 PASSENGER HIGH BACK SEATS WITH HEADREST, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 36,000 MILES. IDEAL TAXIS

Y REG TOYOTA HIACE

2.4 DIESEL,5 SPEED ,PAS, MEDIUM WHEEL BASE, LOW ROOF, SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 3 SEATS 7 TWO WHEEL CHAIR POSITIONS,Q-SRAINT RESTRAINT SYSTEM, RICON FULLY AUTOMATIC TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER MINT CONDITION , 33,000 miles

2001-03 RENAULT MASTER

MM33, 2.2 DCI, 5 SPEED, PAS, MWB, O & H CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 7 SEATS PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR SPACES, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION CHOICE OF FOUR

V REG VOLKSWAGEN LT46

TURBO DIESEL, PAS, LWB, WHITACRES CONVERSION, LARGE POWER PLUG DOOR, HIGH ROOF, 16 REMOVABLE HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RATCLIFFE UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER, COIF.

2003 03 REG RENAULT TRAFFIC 100

1.9 DCI, 5 SPEED ,PAS, SHORT WHEEL BASE, O & H CONVERSION, SIDE LOADING DOOR, 8 SEATS PLUS DRIVER, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER MINT CONDITION ,18,000 miles

R REG,MERCEDES SPRINTER 312D

2.8 TURBO DIESEL,UVG LAZER BODY, PAS, LWB, SIDE DOOR, TWIN YORK 4 STRETCHERS, WITH SEAT BACKS, BULK HEAD DOOR, EBERSPACHER HEATER, STROBE BLUES & SIREN,ONE OWNER, GOOD CONDITION, CHOICE OF 5

04 REG 2004 RENAULT MASTER T35

2.5, 5 SPEED,PAS, LONG WHEEL BASE, MELLOR CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 14 SEATS OR 10 PLUS 2 WHEEL CHAIRS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, MINT CONDITION, 16,000 MILES

02 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35

2.5 TURBO DIESEL 109 BHP, PAS, LUXURY SPEC FRANK GUY CONVERSION, TWIN SLD'S, TINTED WINDOWS, 10 HIGH BACK SEATS,OVER HEAD LOCKERS, WITH AIR & LAMPS REAR STORAGE AREA, EBERSPACHER CLIMATE CONTROL, EX DEMO 16,000 MILES

52 REG RENAULT MASTER

LM35, 2.DCI , 5 SPEED, PAS, LWB, EUROMOTIVE CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 12 SEATS, GLIDE RITE LOWERING SUSPENSION WITH FOLD OUT RAMP, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 55,000 MILES

NEW 06 REG, IVECO 40.C13

2.9 TURBO DIESEL IRIS CONVERSION 14 HIGH BACK COGENT SEATS. DOUBLE FRONT PASSENGER SEAT ,SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, HIGH ROOF, M2 FLOOR, LOT'S OF SPACE, DELIVERY MILEAGE ONLY, IN STOCK.

2002 52 REG FORD TRANSIT 350

LONG WHEEL BASE, TURBO DIESEL, AUTOMATIC, PAS, HIGH ROOF SIDE ENTRY DOOR WITH STEP,12 HIGH BACK SEATS ,UNWIN TRACKING FOR 2 W/ CHAIRS RATCLIFF UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER, VERY LOW MILES 5500 MILES

NEW UN REGISTERED VOLKSWAGEN LT46

TURBO DIESEL, VDL KUSTER CONVERSION, 16 SEATS. LARGE POWER PLUG DOOR, HIGH ROOF, BONDED WINDOWS , LOW M2 FLOOR, M2 HIGH BACK SEATS 3 WHEEL CHAIR POSITIONS ,TRACKING, HEATER, LOWERED FLOOR WITH FOLD OUT SIDE RAMP

T REG 1999 FORD TRANSIT 2.5 TD

MANUAL,CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BODY, P A S, 15 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, RICON UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, SLIDING DOOR FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 48,000 MILES

1999 T REG IVECO 49.10 TURBO DAILY

LONG WHEEL BASE, 5 SPEED, PAS, HIGH ROOF, POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY WITH STEP, 16 HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RATCLIFF UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 65,000 MILES CHOICE OF 2

04 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35

MWB, 2.5 TURBO DIESEL 109 BHP,PAS, ADVACED CONVERSION, SLD, 8 HIGH BACK SEATS + DRIVER, REAR BULK HEAD FITTED WITH MICROWAVE AND HANDWASH REAR STORAGE AREA WITH HAND WASH AND TOOL STORAGE, EX DEMO 16,000 MILES

VOLKSWAGEN LT35 2.5 TURBO DIESEL

NEW UN REGISTERED. LWB, UPRATED TO 3850KGS GVW, 15 ABACUS HIGH BACK SEATS + DRIVER,.SLIDING SIDE DOOR WITH AVS STEP, HIGH ROOF, UNWIN TRACKING, AMF PLS FULLY AUTOMATIC INTERNAL TAIL LIFT, NEW CONVERSION IN STOCK

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1987 E REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
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1999 PP IVECO EURO MIDI
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1989 PP DENNIS CONDORS
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1994 L REG DENNIS DART,
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1997 P REG VOLVO OLYMPIANS,
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1989 F REG LEYLAND TIGER,
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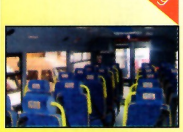

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Choice

Choice

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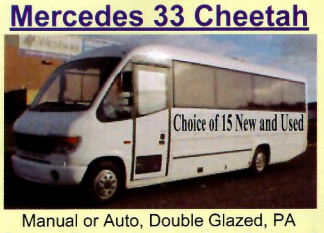

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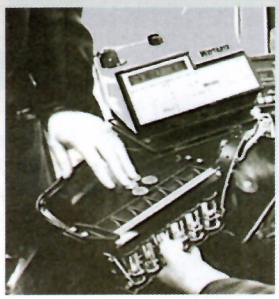

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400 years of service

The TWM drivers say goodbye

Travel West Midlands' Birmingham Central garage has said a final farewell to 14 retiring bus drivers, who between them have racked up a total of 416 years of service with Travel West Midlands and its predecessors.

Those retiring were (in order of service years): Joe Collins (44 years), John McElroy (41 years), Dennis Foley (38 years), Martin Tucker (36 years), Mick McGettrick (35 years), Roger Nicholls (31 years), Graham Wassell (31 years), Mohammed Ali (30 years), Graham Biddle (29 years), John Dougherty (28 years), Roger Carter (22 years), Dave Doyle (22 years), Bernard Boyle (16 years) and Derek Boulton (13 years)

Mick McPike, General Manager at TWM's Birmingham Central garage paid tribute to their commitment. He said: "It's rare within the bus industry these days to have such a huge amount of service and dedication to one organisation. We are very proud of the efforts all 14 drivers made over the years and they will be missed by all our staff at the garage. We wish them well for their retirement."

The drivers are pictured outside TWM's Birmingham Central garage alongside a 1954 vintage Daimler double-decker.

Ayats' new man Paul Montague

Montague joins Ayats

Paul Montague has joined Somerset-based Ayats Ltd to help sell the single and double-decker coaches in the Spanish-built range.

Mr Montague has a depth of experience, starting with more than nine years at PSV Commercial. He then went to Coach Europe to sell Beulas, and latterly worked for Alf Moseley Continental.

A spokesman for Ayats said: "Paul is looking forward to the challenge of promoting sales of Ayats vehicles. He has great confidence in the product and the back-up we give for all our Ayats customers."

Two minute interview

Full name: Danny McGee
Age: 31
Occupation: MD of Esker Bus and Coach And KVC Manufacturing Ltd
Is the PSV industry on its way up, down or static? If opportunities are taken, and supported by appropriate regulation, then it is on the way up
Which recent legislation has been most irritating or useless? The introduction of digital tachographs
Give the industry's business managers 20 words of helpful advice: Do not underestimate your role or abilities, and push your message to your customer and the regulator
Who, in the last 50 years, has been most influential in the industry and why? There have been many key players from operating and manufacturing sides, however, it looks like Mr Congestion will probably prove to be the most influential...
Which vehicle – coach, bus, motorcycle or car – do you love the most, and why? Ferrari 360 Spider. Would love to own one
If you asked your best friend or partner, what would they say is your worst attribute? Getting too involved in the smaller details of everyday life
Who would play you in the film version of the story of your life? Colin Farrell (mad Irishman)
Who would you have as your co-star? Lara Croft (played by Angelina Jolie in the movie Tomb Raider)

■ Fancy taking part in our Two Minute Interview? E-mail *mark.williams@rouncymedia.co.uk*

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LOCAL BUS SERVICE CONTRACTS IN THE REDCAR & CLEVELAND, MIDDLESBROUGH AND STOCKTON-ON-TEES AREAS

The Council will be inviting tenders for local bus services, mainly, though not exclusively, in the Redcar & Cleveland area, with a provisional start date of 30 April 2006. Contracts will potentially operate for a period of 2 years, with an optional 2 year extension.

If you are interested in tendering (and are not already on the tendering list), please write to:

Mr P Beavin, Public Transport Manager, Joint Public Transport Group, Belmont House Rectory Lane, Guisborough TS14 7FD. Fax: (01287) 612520. E-mail: public_transport@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk

For further information, telephone Paul Beavin on (01287) 612529 or Ian Fotherby on (01287) 612528.

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Home to School Transport for Mainstream (Bus and Taxis) and Special Educational Needs / Local Bus Contracts

Falkirk Council is commencing the procurement of home to school transport for Mainstream, Special Educational Needs pupils and Local Bus Contracts. Contracts are for up to 5 years, commencing 5 June 2006 or 22 August 2006, with provision by vehicles of up to 75 passengers seats.
Contracts will be awarded in terms of the most economically advantageous tender using the following criteria:

- **Full-lift cost**
- **Compliance with specification, technical merit and functional characteristics**
- **Demonstrable evidence of sufficient resources to undertake the work**
- **Evidence of recent experience/track record**

Applications are welcomed from suitable experience and qualified companies that wish to be involved in the provision of this service.
The Contract Notice has been published in OJEU inviting Expressions of Interest reference: 2006-34226-EN
To view the tender notice, log onto http://ted.publications.eu.int
Interest parties should apply in writing to:

Falkirk Council
Transport Planning Unit
Development Services
Abbotsford House
Davids Loan
Bainsford
Falkirk
FK2 7YZ

Attention: Douglas Robertson / Lesley Kenny

Closing Date for Tenders to obtain documents is 17 March 2006

Operators currently undertaking Contracts on behalf of Falkirk Council will still require to express an interest.

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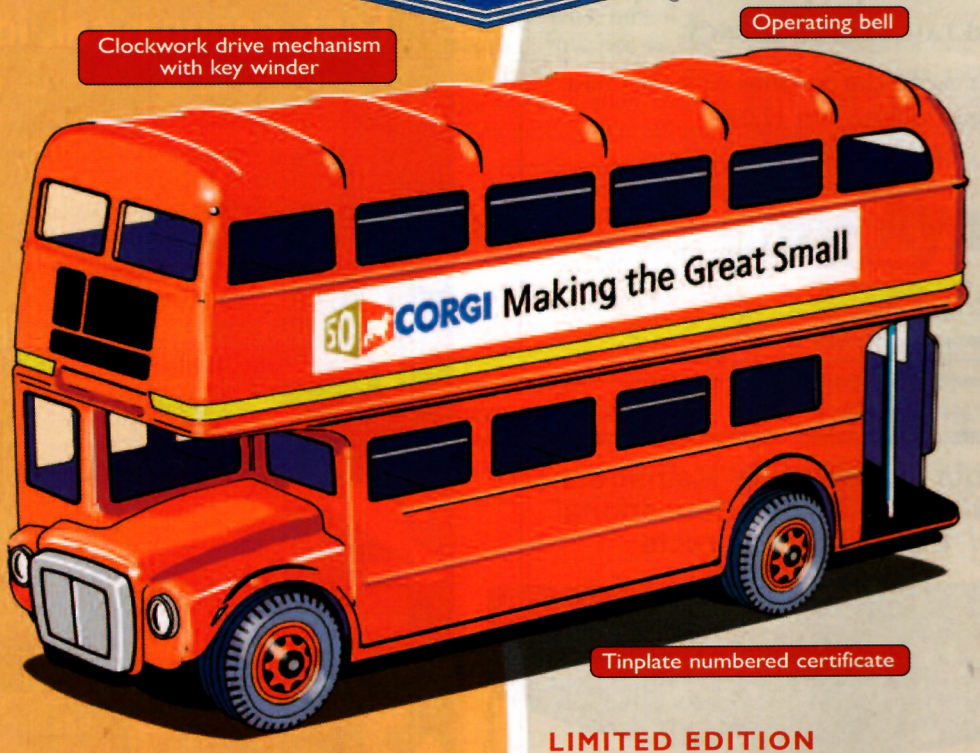
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Mettoy (the name derived from **Met**al **Toy**s) was established in 1934 by Philipp Ullmann and Arthur Katz in Northampton. The original Mettoy models were produced in tinplate and many were fitted with a clockwork mechanism. In 1956 Mettoy launched their own range of small, detailed diecast models to rival the popular Dinky Toys – and the CORGI brand was born.

The original Routemaster Bus was designed in the 1950s and some fifty years after its first appearance, almost 1,000 examples of this famous London bus still exist in the British Isles. Unfortunately, this popular London icon will be withdrawn from service by the end of 2005, but there is no doubt that the bus will remain a legend in its own right.

This tinplate replica Routemaster Bus is the forerunner of a new era of tinplate collecting. Look out for more exciting models from CORGI under the METTOY label in 2007 and join us in celebrating the success of the company who gave birth to the CORGI range which we know and love today.

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